

L u t h e r a n W o r l d F e d e r a t i o n

LWF STUDIES

MINISTRY

Women

Bishops



MINISTRY

Women

Bishops

**Report of an International Consultation
Cartigny, Switzerland, 1992**

**The Lutheran World Federation
Geneva, 1993**

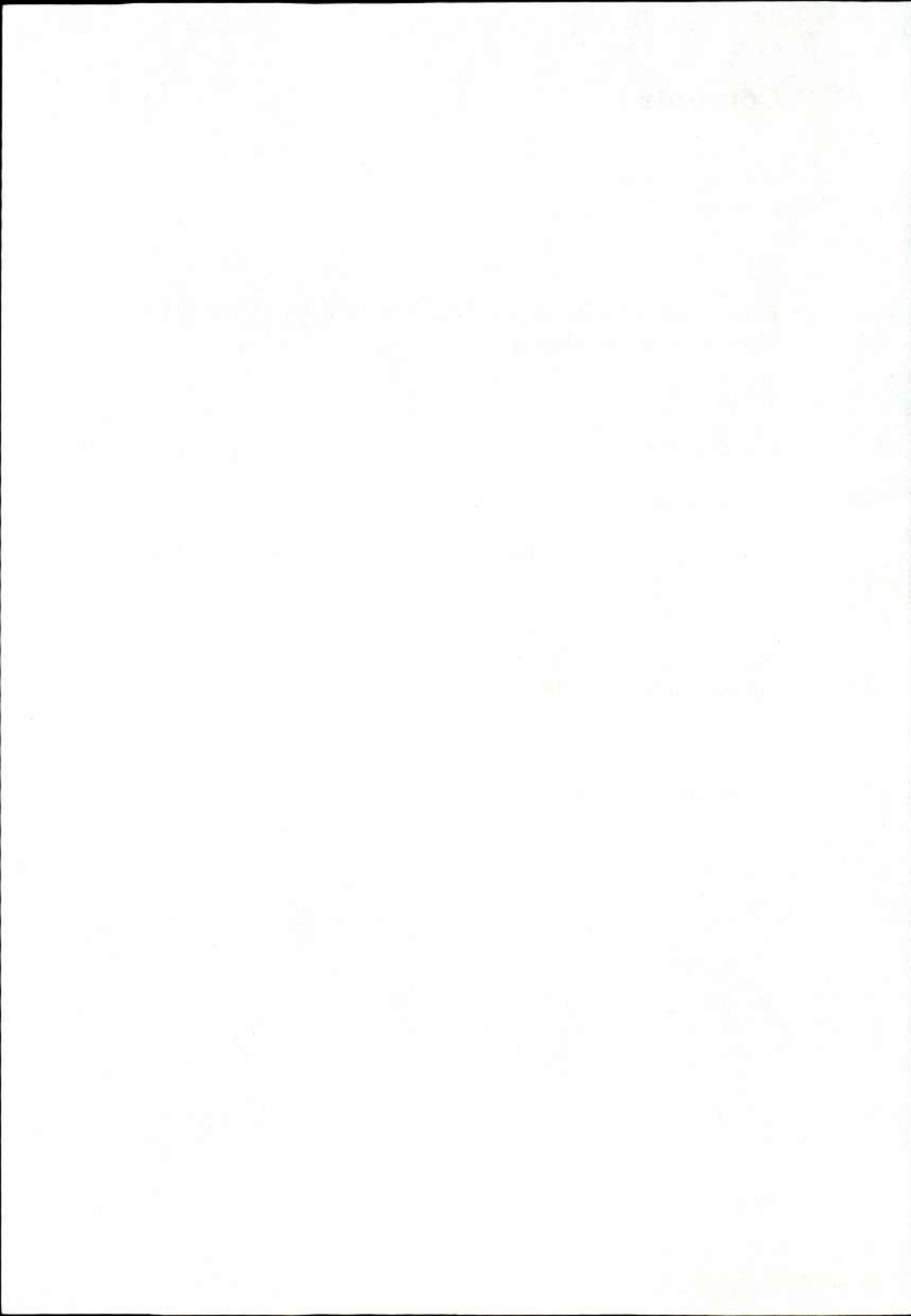
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Preface

Ministry has been an area for investigation, study and consultation over the past two decades both within the Lutheran Communion as a whole and in many of the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation. Lutherans have been involved both with their own understanding of ministry and in bilateral and multilateral efforts toward ecumenical consensus. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the focus tended to be on the relationship between the ministry of the whole people of God and of ordained ministers.

More recently the focus shifted to issues of ordained ministry, especially the ordained ministry of women and the nature and function of bishops, the issues which constituted the agenda of a Consultation on the Ordained Ministry held in Cartigny (Geneva), Switzerland, 29 November - 4 December 1992.

The recent history of LWF involvement in ministry issues is sketched in the first part of the consultation report. It indicates why another Lutheran consultation was needed. One reason was to bring the international discussion in 1982 up to date (the reports are appendices in this booklet). Another reason was to reflect the present situation regarding the ordination of women. Finally, the impact of ecumenical discussions on ministry needed to be assessed.

It is our hope that the 1992 report can serve as a summing up of the past discussion, a tool for study and action in our churches, a signal to our ecumenical partners and a stimulus to continue the discussion of those issues on which consensus still evades us. One such issue, identified by members of the consultation themselves, is diaconal ministry. We also hope that the report will be a contribution to the continuing ecumenical discussion.

We are grateful to those who offered their time and expertise to the work of the consultation, especially to Phyllis Anderson,

Niels Hasselmann and Michael Root who did the drafting. Further thanks are due to Musimbi Kanyoro of the Office for Women in Church and Society, and to Harding Meyer and Michael Root of the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, who helped shape the consultation and were important contributors to its report. We also acknowledge our debt to the ecumenical participants who insured that the broader context of our deliberations on ministry was not forgotten.

Eugene L. Brand
Assistant General Secretary
for Ecumenical Affairs

Pentecost 1993

Consultation on the Ordained Ministry of Women and the Episcopal Ministry

1. Introduction

1. In preparation for the Seventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (1984 in Budapest) the former Commission and Department of Studies engaged the member churches in a study of ministry. Its focus was primarily on the relationship between "the universal priesthood and the ordained ministry."¹ After analyzing various materials and information from the member churches, a study paper was issued together with selected documentation (*The Ministry of All Baptized Believers*, Geneva, 1980) to encourage self-studies.

2. Subsequently two consultations were held in Geneva: "Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office" and "Women in the Ministries of the Church." Reports bearing those titles were published in the series *LWF Studies* in 1983. A third volume in that series was "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry," a staff paper which attempted to summarize what had been learned

¹ For definitions of the terms "ministry," "ordained ministry," and "episcopal ministry," see below p. 37 "Lutheran Understanding of Ministry," 1-3. Following its use, we will here use the terms "ordained ministry," "pastoral office," "ministerial office," and "office of word and sacrament" as equivalent terms. The relation of this office to a diaconate is an issue we have not discussed. The Lutheran World Federation needs to address the nature of the diaconate, ordained or unordained, in its continuing discussion of the nature of ministry.

from the churches and from the two consultations. All three volumes were before the Seventh Assembly, being basic resource material for two working groups: 3. Enabling Ministry and 6. Partnership of Women and Men.

3. The Assembly received the reports of the two working groups and recommended that consideration of ministry remain a programmatic concern in the LWF.² Though no specific study programs have been undertaken since 1984, ministry has been a continuing concern in bilateral dialogues between the LWF and other Christian World Communions and in the work of the office, Women in Church and Society. In both cases the 1983 study booklets have continued to play a role. Though the more general concern of that time has not been forgotten, i.e., the wholeness of the church's ministry embracing both lay and ordained ministries, the points of concern within ministry have become more specific: the ordination of women and the nature and structure of episcopal ministry.

4. Regarding the ordination of women, the Seventh Assembly made two resolutions:³

6.7. To urge the LWF member churches that do not ordain women to take specific steps toward that affirmative action.

6.8. To urge the LWF member churches that do ordain women to develop policies that ensure equality in service opportunities and benefits.

Progress has been made in relation to both resolutions, and this was reported to the Eighth Assembly (1990 in Curitiba) in the address of the General Secretary.⁴ Except in its specific resolu-

² *Budapest 1984*. Proceedings of the Seventh Assembly, *LWF Report* 19/20 (1985), 202ff and 227.

³ *Ibid.* 227.

⁴ *Curitiba 1990*. Proceedings of the Eighth Assembly, *LWF Report* 28/29 (1990), 15f.

tion on Anglican-Lutheran Relationships⁵ and its commitment in relation to the ordination of women,⁶ the Curitiba Assembly did not directly address questions of ordained ministry.

5. The publication in 1982 of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper 111, hereafter, BEM) has also had a major impact on Lutheran thinking about ordained ministry, as responses of LWF member churches clearly indicate. Together with publications of bilateral dialogues both international and national/regional, this book documents the ecumenical discussion and provides it with further impetus.

6. Thought about both the ordination of women and the nature of the episcopal office has also been shaped by the inter-Lutheran and ecumenical discussion on communion (*koinonia*). Because of the constitutive role of baptism, the concept of communion calls into question any separations within the church based on sociological or cultural distinctions. It is a factor in calling into question the extension of ordination only among males. In quite another way the concept of communion raises the issue of bishops as signs of the unity which communion assumes. There can be little doubt that what is often called "*communio ecclesiology*" plays a central role in the contemporary discussion regarding church and ministry.⁷

7. This paper is the result of an LWF consultation on both the ordained ministry of women and episcopal ministry held in Cartigny (Geneva) toward the end of 1992. Such a consultation was suggested already by the pre-Curitiba Standing Committee on Ecumenical Relations. In endorsing the proposal of the pre-

⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶ See below, No. 33.

⁷ On the unity of the church as *communio*, see the study by the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, *Communio/Koinonia: A New Testament-Early Church Christian Concept and its Contemporary Appropriation and Significance* (Strasbourg: Institute for Ecumenical Research, 1990).

sent Standing Committee for Ecumenical Affairs, the LWF Council agreed that a follow-up to the 1982/83 consultations is needed to reflect on the subsequent discussion, and especially its impact on the ordination of women and the nature of episcopacy.⁸

8. The paper attempts to articulate where Lutherans themselves have come in their thinking on these subjects and is offered both for further discussion and for guidance in dealing with them locally. For that reason, it does not attempt to register every shade of theological opinion, seeking instead the ground of general consensus.

9. The paper does not attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding either of the ministry of the whole people of God or of the pastoral ministry. Rather it builds on the statements from the early 1980s referred to above (see above, No. 2) in relation to the specific topics of the ordained ministry of women and episcopal ministry. These earlier statements are assumed as the background for what is here said.

10. While the focus of this statement is the ministry of ordained women and episcopal ministry, it should be reiterated that the context for all the church's ministries is the baptismal vocation of the whole people of God to be a royal, prophetic, and priestly people (1 Pet 2:5,9). All Christians participate in Christ and his mission through baptism, the eucharist, and the faithful hearing of and witness to the word. This participation is given specific character by the gifts of the Spirit given to each (Rom 12:4-7; 1 Cor 12). A gift essential to the life of the church is the office

⁸ Cf. Roman Catholic-Lutheran Joint Commission, *The Ministry in the Church* (1981); *The Niagara Report* (1987); "An Open Letter to the Church Leaders of the Lutheran Churches in Africa," African Lutheran Women Theologians Consultation (1990); Statement of the 1992 APATS Consultation, "Mission and the Asian Church in the 21st Century from the Viewpoint of Women."

of pastoral ministry, instituted by God, which centers in proclamation of the word and administration of the sacraments (2 Cor 4:1-6; CA 5). The pastoral ministry is only rightly understood when placed in relation to the many ministries through which Christians live out their baptismal vocation and exercise their gifts.

2. The Ordained Ministry of Women

11. Since the middle of this century, the ordination of women has become increasingly accepted by Lutheran churches. In some cases the decision was reached easily, in others it came after prolonged and sometimes bitter struggle. Experience has shown that usually congregations come gratefully to accept the ministry of ordained women. The majority of Lutherans now belong to churches which ordain women. Nevertheless, several Lutheran churches do not ordain women and resistance continues within some churches which do.

12. The consensus required to reach the decision to ordain women is not built through theological studies and debates alone. As in most areas of church life, there is interplay between theology and the prevailing culture. In some cases theological study of the matter has been prompted by cultural patterns of "equal opportunities" between men and women: if women hold positions of leadership in society, why can they not be ordained to all positions of pastoral leadership in the church? In other cases, theological affirmations have challenged patriarchal cultural patterns: women should be ordained to all positions of pastoral leadership in the church even though leadership positions in society are mostly held by men. Both approaches to the issue are legitimate so long as the decision reached is ultimately grounded in the biblical substance of Christian faith.

A Rationale for the Ordination of Women

13. Lutherans do not have or need to develop a theology of female ministry. Rather we have a theology of ordained ministry developed in relation to an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God and grounded in the Reformation understanding of justification through faith. The question of who may be ordained arises only after we agree on the theology of ministry. The primary question must then be: is there any basis in our theological understanding of ordained ministry which prevents us from ordaining any baptized person who has the needed gifts and whom we are convinced is called by God? On the basis of our present understanding of Scripture and of the gospel, we are convinced that the ordained ministry must be open to both men and women.

14. Because of the centuries-long practice of ordaining only men, the debated question often becomes: what are the reasons for ordaining women? This form of the question contains at least two traps into which churches may fall. One trap is to allow theology to become captive to the prevailing culture: we should ordain women because our society guarantees women equal rights and opportunities. A second trap is to allow theology to become captive to prevailing ecclesial practice: we should not ordain women because the church traditionally has ordained only men. These are inappropriate answers theologically, and are called forth by having asked the wrong question. The traps can be all the more alluring because both the influence of prevailing culture and the weight of traditional ecclesial practice must be taken seriously by churches concerned about both incarnational relevance and apostolic continuity or faithfulness. Nevertheless, neither prevailing culture nor traditional ecclesial practice can themselves be theologically decisive over against fundamental convictions of the gospel.

15. The openness of the ordained ministry to both men and women is grounded in the nature of the church as an eschatological reality. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God's kingdom has broken into history. As a priestly, prophetic, and royal people, the church is set as a sign of God's kingdom and is given the mission to witness to that kingdom in word and deed. God gives the church the Holy Spirit to energize its ministry and make it bear fruit.

16. In our theological understanding of the church and its ordained ministry, the eschatological dimension must be central. We must not confuse the church with the kingdom, but neither may we disregard the fundamental fact that the people of God already participate through faith in the life of the coming kingdom. Within every concrete cultural context we must challenge whatever hinders the church from being an effective sign of God's kingdom. All barriers built on differences of race, class, economic status, caste, or sex which contradict human community disappear in God's kingdom. Those barriers can have no place in the church which is a sign of that kingdom. Sexual distinctions created by God remain within the church and enrich community and ministry. Such distinctions, however, should not hinder the participation of women in all aspects of the missionary life of the church, including the ordained ministry. Central to the church's eschatological faith is the Pauline declaration: "for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3, 26-28 NRSV).

17. Galatians 3:28 is not an isolated or marginal passage within Paul's total theology or within the New Testament as a whole. The passage stands as shorthand for a whole Pauline way of thinking which is in harmony with other New Testament writers. The exclusion of women from ordained ministry has sometimes been justified by appeals to Paul's apparent prohibition of women speaking in church (e.g., 1 Cor 14:34). In light not just of

Galatians 3:28 but also of Paul's clear assumption that women will prophesy (1 Cor 11:5) it is difficult to understand 1 Corinthians 14 as implying an in-principle denial of women's participation in the worship of the congregation. In this case, our practice must be guided by our total understanding of the New Testament gospel and its implications.

18. Ordination historically has been limited to men, and in many cases still is, on the basis of a different understanding of the pertinent biblical texts and of the structure of creation and its relation to the new creation. The church has always, however, profited from the preaching, teaching, and leadership of women. Today, we no longer share in the convictions of our forebears in the faith which led them to restrict ordination to men. The spiritual experience of the church has led us to a deeper understanding of the church and its ministry. We find that the contemporary mission of the church requires the gifts of both men and women in the ordained ministry. A church which today limits its ordained ministry to males blurs its nature as eschatological sign.

19. In many Lutheran churches today, women not only can be ordained as pastors but also can be and in a few cases have been elected bishop. We expect that the election of women as bishops will become increasingly common and we welcome this development. In light of the Lutheran emphasis on the one office of ministry, we find that no in-principle question can be raised about the possibility of female bishops once the question of the ordination of women has been answered affirmatively.⁹

⁹ The only possible objections could be practical and functional, but we find such objections generally unconvincing. E.g., one might object that since bishops are to be foci of unity, the election of a bishop not recognized by all in the church or not recognized by other churches is at least not advisable. We cannot accept such an argument, for reasons discussed below under "Ecumenical Implications."

Continuing Dissent and Resistance to the Ministry of Ordained Women

20. As noted above, doubts about and active resistance to the ordination of women remain, even in churches where ordained women have become part of their life. On occasion, forms of backlash arise even after years of active ministry by ordained women. Churches need to be aware of such developments and give attention both to those with dissenting views and those women who are discouraged by the resurfacing of questions they had thought had been answered.

21. Opposition to women's ordination in churches which do not yet ordain women is sometimes theologically motivated (see above, No. 18), but often seems to be justified by an appeal to prevailing cultural values which in general exclude the leadership of women. The church must challenge cultural presuppositions which prevent the full participation of women in church and society and must work toward more just structures. The church witnesses to the rule of Christ when, against the prevailing culture, it provides for the ordination of women and supports all women in the exercise of their ministries.

22. The appeal to culture, however, may in fact be an appeal to a culture which prevails only within the church, a distinct "church culture." The problem lies not with the culture of the surrounding society but with a particular culture that has developed within the church. Churches whose roots are in the missionary movements of the 19th and 20th centuries often struggle with a "church culture" imposed by missionaries to counter what they perceived as a prevailing, hostile pagan culture. After many decades, however, not only is that "church culture" foreign to the churches in the countries from which it was imported, but it also becomes a barrier to evangelism locally.

23. Unfortunately it is sometimes the case that these churches with close ties to missionary movements become the last forum in which expatriate opponents of the ordination of women can influence church policy. It is they and the distinctive "church culture" they enforce and foster which can become the chief hindrance to the ordination of women. The problem is compounded if the mission relationship is with sending churches themselves opposed to women's ordination. The aura of authority attached to the "mother church" or to missionaries prevents the "younger" church from taking steps it otherwise would take.

24. The special struggle of churches that have recently developed from foreign missions to achieve a proper interaction between the faith and their own indigenous culture is essential for their health and growth. The process will take years to reach even an interim solution and is in a sense never-ending for all churches. Solutions cannot be simply imported or imposed, even though the result must eventually be accepted as authentic developments by global Christianity.

Ecumenical Implications

25. Some object to ordaining women because they see it as a serious obstacle to full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox, or some conservative evangelical churches. This objection not only can lead some to oppose the ordination of women, it can also raise anxiety, especially on the part of women themselves, that if ordained women would finally become the only remaining obstacle to full communion with, say, Rome, then Lutherans would choose Rome and abandon their women clergy.

26. On the global level, Lutherans have made clear in their ecumenical dialogues that they ordain women. Ordained women are included in the dialogue teams themselves. While the ordination of women has not yet, as such, become the subject of international bilateral dialogue, there is no reason to believe that the Lutheran churches are prepared to compromise their biblical and

theological convictions on this point. Any ecumenical conversation involving Lutherans about the church or its ministry will have to face squarely the fact that when another Christian World Communion recognizes Lutheran ministries, it will mean recognizing ministries exercised by both women and men.

27. In addition, the ecumenical implications of the ordination of women are not one-sided. If a church considers not ordaining women because that would hinder ecumenical relations with churches which ordain only men, it should recognize that the non-ordination of women would hinder ecumenical relations with the many churches that do. Whichever action a church takes on this question, ecumenical relations with churches which take an opposed position will become more complicated.

Full Integration of Ordained Women into the Life of the Church

28. Some Lutheran churches have now ordained women for decades. In many cases, however, a double-standard related to sex has not been overcome. Even where the ordination of women is fully accepted and scarcely an issue any longer, women are more likely than men to serve in "specialized" ministries rather than in parishes. Women have a greater tendency than men to become institutional chaplains, student pastors, church staff persons, etc. Even where women serve on a parish staff, it is seldom as senior pastor. Salaries of women pastors are often lower than those of their male counterparts. Congregations and/or bishops sometimes seem reticent to regard women pastors as on a par with men.¹⁰

29. This reality means that the decision to ordain women does not close the question of the position of women in the church. When they take that step, churches must also develop concrete strategies to assist in the full integration of women into the or-

¹⁰ Though statistical data on these points is unavailable, they come up repeatedly in discussions among women of their experience in ordained ministry.

dained ministry. It would be unrealistic to suppose that attitudes reinforced by centuries of church life can be totally changed by simply altering church constitutions. A church which begins to ordain women and then glosses over the problem of their full integration is not acting with full integrity.

30. True integration should not require women to adapt to an already existing context of ministerial life formed by and around ordained men. The particular gifts and talents ordained women bring with them into the collegium of ordained ministers must influence its character so that eventually it will be different from what it had been before. Thus, the understanding and practice of ordained ministry will be enlarged. A church which ordains women but neglects such change is again not acting with full integrity.

31. Strategies that further the equality of women and men within ordained ministry have a clear theological point of departure, but they also require dealing ecclesially with such things as structural problems, assumed privileges, habitual procedures, and expectations. They also require dealing with the social and psychological problems which arise whenever women are included in a previously male profession. In particular, they have a bearing on the place of women in leading positions and governing structures of the church. These problems were noted in the 1983 document *Women in the Ministries of the Church* where they were discussed at greater length than is possible here. In addressing these issues it will become increasingly important for churches to share their experiences with one another. A church where women have been ordained for some years has experience to share with a church which has just begun the practice. Churches should be intentional about dealing with these problems in their own lives, equipping women and men together to change expectations, behavior, and structures.

Advocacy

32. The Seventh Assembly (1984) of the Lutheran World Federation "urged" member churches who did not ordain women to take steps toward doing so (see above, No. 4). The Eighth Assembly's commitment (1990) was more emphatic: "We commit ourselves and our member churches to intensify our efforts to be a sign of an inclusive communion in the world. To that end, we will: Work out a clear plan of action in every member church which fully expresses the equality of men and women within the life of the church and enables the churches to benefit from the potential which women are able to give to all areas of church life; Undertake, through consultation and cooperation of all member churches and in a climate of mutual respect, practical efforts to open the way for women to enter the ordained ministry of all our member churches."¹¹

33. In this document we state our agreement that the practice of ordaining women to the pastoral ministry is an expression of our obedience to the gospel. We affirm the advocacy of the practice by two LWF Assemblies. We challenge the LWF member churches who have not yet done so to include women in ordained ministry. Furthermore we challenge member churches where women are included in ordained ministry both to work toward their full integration and also to support other churches in the Lutheran communion who are addressing this matter by sharing with them their own experience.

3. The Episcopal Ministry

34. When we reflect theologically on the church and its structures, fundamental convictions of the gospel and historical context must come together. The church always participates in its

¹¹ Proceedings Curitiba, 82.

concrete social and historical setting; in this setting it is called to be the one apostolic church of all times and places, living by the one gospel. Continuity and faithfulness in a changing historical setting is of double concern to any discussion of episcopacy. On the one hand, continuity and faithfulness in its own historical moment is a peculiar concern of episcopal oversight. On the other, our understanding of the episcopal office must itself reflect this concern for faithfulness and continuity within change.

35. This statement also must reflect its historical context. It is not the first international Lutheran statement on episcopacy. Most notably, it builds on the 1983 LWF statement, "Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office". What was said there need not be fully repeated here. More broadly, this statement builds on twentieth-century Lutheran and ecumenical history, a history in which episcopal structures have received new forms and the ecumenical possibilities of an evangelically reshaped episcopacy have taken on new significance.

Episcopal Ministry in Twentieth-Century Lutheranism

36. The twentieth-century has seen radical changes in the internal structures of many Lutheran churches. In 1900, the majority of Lutherans belonged to national or regional churches with leaders called something other than bishops. Today, the vast majority of Lutherans are members of churches that use the title bishop. The change in language reflects changes in the understanding and structures of church leadership that have had various sources.

37. In the course of the twentieth century, episcopacy, normally related to some form of synodical structure, has come to be the typical (though not universal) form of Lutheran church leadership.¹² Following World War I, episcopacy developed among con-

¹² Synodical structures vary among the Lutheran churches in their structure, nature and nomenclature.

tinental European Lutheran churches as they broke their ties with the state, (e.g., the *landesherrliche Kirchenregiment* in Germany). Recently, the North American churches adopted the title of bishop. Many former missionary churches in Africa, Latin America, and Asia adopted forms of episcopacy as they became self-governing. Even episcopacy in the Nordic churches, preserved since before the Reformation, developed from its historical state-church tradition to face new political and social situations.

38. Throughout the twentieth century, the visible unity of world Lutheranism has increased. The vast majority of the world's Lutherans are now members of churches that belong to the Lutheran World Federation, itself now understood as a communion of churches in fellowship one with another.¹³ Signs of this Lutheran communion have been sought and found. One sign of this communion has been the invitation of bishops from one church to participate in the installation, consecration, or ordination¹⁴ of bishops of other Lutheran churches.

39. Historical study had made it increasingly clear that the Lutheran Reformers and Confessions viewed some form of episcopacy as the normal polity of the church, while being sharply critical of the episcopate of their time. They expected that if any healing of the Reformation breach was to be achieved, it would involve as an important element an evangelically reformed episcopate.

40. Disputes over the episcopacy and its nature became an important element in the divisions of the church. While differences still exist between Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and other understandings of oversight in the church, important ecumenical documents have opened up the

¹³ See the constitution of the LWF, Article III, as revised by the Eight Assembly, Proceedings Curitiba, 141.

¹⁴ Different Lutheran churches use different terms for this rite. These differences may be just terminological but may also indicate different understandings of episcopacy.

possibility that episcopacy might again become a servant of, rather than hindrance to, unity. Here BEM, the Lutheran-Roman Catholic proposal *Facing Unity*, and the Anglican-Lutheran *Niagara Report* and related Anglican-Lutheran proposals in North America and Northern Europe should be mentioned.¹⁵

41. These developments and proposals have been welcomed by many, but have also evoked resistance and dissent. Some view such developments and proposals as expressions of backward-looking or authoritarian tendencies which do not serve contemporary mission. In addition, they fear that relations with non-episcopal churches might be weakened. Above all, they worry that crucial Lutheran insights into the nature of the ministry of the gospel might be lost.

42. These various changes and opportunities call us to consider again the possibilities, both within the Lutheran communion and in our relations beyond this communion, that can be found in a renewed episcopacy. The following statement does not seek to provide a full outline of such an understanding of episcopacy but highlights those themes of most importance to the present.

The Episcopal Office of Oversight

43. Episcopacy originates out of the ministry of oversight and leadership of the local congregation gathered in worship around the word and table of the Lord. Already within the New Testament, we find forms of a pastoral oversight being exercised regionally. Rapidly in the history of the early church, regional structures of oversight developed under the leadership of bishops

¹⁵ A recent survey of ecumenical proposals involving Lutherans that relate to ministry and episcopacy is Daniel F. Martensen, "Ministry," in *Lutherans in Ecumenical Dialogue: A Reappraisal*, edited by Joseph A. Burgess (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1990), 123-135.

(although the regions of oversight were often small by modern standards). The theological understanding and organization of episcopacy have varied greatly in the history of the church. Nevertheless, its exercise by a single bishop, united in collegial communion with other such bishops, came to be the virtually universal form of church leadership. It is still the most widely exercised form of leadership within the church. In contemporary ecumenical discussions episcopacy refers to this regional ministry of oversight.

44. The Lutheran Reformers rejected the form episcopacy had taken in the late medieval Holy Roman Empire. In their eyes, the bishops had become temporal princes who opposed the proclamation of the gospel. The Reformers consistently advocated a reform of this episcopacy (e.g., in CA 28). Because their call went unheeded within the Holy Roman Empire, the Lutherans were forced to create other forms of oversight within their churches.¹⁶ They remained convinced, however, that the original, biblical principal of *episcopé* was preserved in the various forms of local and regional oversight which were exercised in their churches.

45. As a result of this history, Lutheran churches in much of the European continent (unlike those in Scandinavia) did not continue succession in canonical episcopal ordinations and ceased to have ministers called bishops. As noted above, only in our century have forms of episcopacy linked to synodical structures become the most common form of church leadership in Lutheranism.

46. While the precise forms and tasks of episcopacy vary within contemporary Lutheranism, certain common traits typify episcopacy in the Lutheran churches. It is always a *personal*,

¹⁶ This oversight took various forms in different Lutheran estates. Under the general authority of the state, it was exercised by individuals (e.g., superintendents), by special committees, and by bodies such as theological faculties.

communal, and *collegial* ministry.¹⁷ Bishops are themselves pastoral ministers of word and sacraments, representing the ministry of Christ toward the church. Their ministry is understood to be a distinct form of the one pastoral office, not a separate office. Their regional oversight is thus itself a form of pastoral ministry. Increasingly, administrative structures and tasks are a necessary part of episcopal ministry. While administrative structures are a necessary and useful means, the ministry of oversight of a bishop should in important ways be distinct from mere bureaucratic supervision. The ministry of the bishop is always a *personal* ministry.

47. Certain activities are characteristic of a bishop's ministry.¹⁸ Among these are:

- advising and supporting congregational life throughout a region, especially through visitation;
- enabling Christian faith to grow in the church and in the life of all its members;
- guarding the faith by seeking to assure that the witness of the church is in accord with the gospel;
- ordaining pastors and serving as pastor to pastors;
- representing the church in the public sector;
- providing leadership for the church in a wide range of aspects of its life.

In recent years, Lutherans have placed increasing emphasis on episcopal ministry as serving the unity of the church and as witnessing for justice and peace in the wider society. The question of the role and authority of bishops in teaching is receiving increased attention among Lutherans.

¹⁷ On all ordained ministry as personal, communal, and collegial, see BEM, M 26.

¹⁸ A fuller description of these activities can be found in "Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office," 17.

48. As was stated in "Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office," paragraph 23, persons who carry out these activities should be understood as carrying out the episcopal office. The integrity of their ministry should be respected and it should receive appropriate recognition. Ecumenical and popular understanding would be facilitated if such persons in episcopal ministries were uniformly called "bishop."¹⁹

49. Episcopal ministry is always a *communal* ministry. It is "rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit" (BEM, M 26). Bishops are called to a special role of oversight in the church, but the wider community also is called to participate in oversight and to judge the way in which episcopal ministry is being carried out. The development of various committees, synods, and institutions, including clergy and lay persons, which share tasks of oversight with the bishop is in line with Lutheran understandings of ministry. The sheep know their Shepherd and are empowered to test the Spirits (John 19:4f; 1 John 4:1; 5:10).²⁰ In this sense episcopal ministry is carried out *within* the community and not over it. Within the church there is no absolute distinction between the directed and the directing, between the teaching and the taught, between those who decide and those who are the objects of decision. Mutual accountability binds together episcopal and other ministries with all baptized believers. It is through the *communio* of charisms, the total interplay of ministries within which episcopal ministry plays a leading role, that the church trusts that it will be led into the truth.

19 Such a recommendation has been made within the VELKD ("Das Amt im ökumenischen Kontext", 107) and ecumenically by the Anglican-Lutheran *Niagara Report*, 9. Some special designation (e.g., presiding bishop, archbishop) might be needed to differentiate persons with certain supraregional responsibilities.

20 Cf. *Bishop, Priest, and Deacon in the Church of Sweden*, 15f.

Episcopal Ministry and the Unity of the Church

50. A concern with the unity of the church is of the very nature of the episcopal office. The church is one in the common proclamation of the gospel and celebration of the sacraments (CA 7). Since episcopal oversight is concerned above all with the evangelical character of the total ministry carried out within its region, it is concerned with what makes the church one and thus with its unity. Most Lutheran churches thus rightly see the bishop as having particular ecumenical responsibilities. Bishops should be ministers of reconciliation both within and beyond their own churches.

51. Since unity in word and sacraments is at the center of the unity of the church and bishops are concerned with furthering a truly evangelical proclamation of the word and celebration of the sacraments, it is important that oversight be carried out in different regions of the church with a common sense of what constitutes an evangelical exercise of the office of ministry. There is one office of ministry common to the entire church, and the episcopal office is concerned with keeping this one ministry rightly oriented toward the one gospel. While episcopal oversight will be carried out in different ways, depending on context and personalities, a common understanding of the gospel, a unity in the goals of oversight, is central to the preservation of the unity of the church in the one gospel. Episcopal ministry thus must always be a *collegial* ministry, carried out in unity with other bishops.

52. One aspect of the communion of the church in the gospel is thus rightly a communion in episcopacy. Since episcopal oversight is exercised as a pastoral and thus personal ministry, a unity in episcopal functions is also a communion among the persons who carry out these functions. Communion among the bishops is a sign and instrument of unity in that which constitutes

the church as one. In their unity, the bishops "represent the larger church to congregations committed to their charge. They represent the communion of these congregations within and to the larger church" ("Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office," 18).

53. One appropriate symbol of episcopal collegiality is the participation of bishops from one church in the installation, consecration, or ordination of bishops in another.²¹ The unity of the churches in the mission of the gospel is thus symbolized.

54. The relation between the ministry of the bishop and the unity of the church makes it theologically and symbolically appropriate that those who carry out episcopal oversight preside at ordinations of those who will exercise the office of ministry. Ordination is into the ministry of the one church, not simply into the ministry of one denomination or national church or of one diocese or synod. The presiding minister at an ordination, acting on behalf of the whole people of God, is thus rightly the person who instrumentally and symbolically is concerned with the unity of the one church's ministry.²² In addition, the role of the bishop in ordination both realizes and symbolizes the ongoing relation between bishop and clergy in a synod or diocese.²³

²¹ See above, note 14 on terminology.

²² Cf. similar statements and recommendations in "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry," 47, the text on *The Episcopacy* from the commission appointed by the Council of Bishops of the Church of Norway, 68 and 71; *Bishop, Priest, and Deacon in the Church of Sweden*, 45; and "Das Amt im ökumenischen Kontext," from the ökumenischer Studienausschuss of the VELKD, 104.

²³ See *Bishop, Priest, and Deacon in the Church of Sweden*, 45.

Episcopal Ministry and the Continuity of the Church

55. In the same way as episcopal oversight serves and is concerned with the unity of the church, it also serves and is concerned with the church's continuity. The continuity of the church from Pentecost to the end of the ages is constituted by that which also makes it one, the apostolic tradition of the one gospel. All other forms of continuity either are at the service of this continuity or they are irrelevant to the church's true continuity. Just as the unity of the church is served and symbolized by episcopal collegiality (see above, No. 52), so is the continuity of the church served and symbolized by the continuity of episcopal oversight in seeking to further the mission of the one gospel in ever-new situations. Thus, *succession in apostolic mission*, i.e., succession in the apostolic gospel which oversight seeks to serve, is the most important continuity in episcopacy.²⁴

56. Early in the history of the church, the fidelity of certain churches to the gospel was recognized in their succession of bishops, each teaching and preaching the same gospel as his predecessor. Stress fell on the evangelical tradition that had been handed down in certain churches, under the leadership of a series of bishops, each continuing on the same path as his predecessors: *a succession within the see*, that is, a succession of ongoing episcopal ministry in a particular place.²⁵

57. Distinct from a succession in these senses is a *succession of consecrations*, in which each bishop enters episcopal ministry through a laying on of hands by other bishops. In this case, each

²⁴ See BEM, M 34 and "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry," 54f, which quotes this paragraph of BEM. "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry," 55 describes this succession in apostolic mission as "what usually is called apostolic succession." What Lutherans have spoken of as succession in doctrine is central to this succession.

²⁵ Such a succession within the see is possible, of course, only in those lands where Christianity has existed for centuries.

bishop can be seen as entering into a ministry which stretches back however far the line of consecrations runs. The focus is less on episcopal succession in a particular place than on the continuity of the entire episcopal ministry, each person entering with the blessing of the Spirit being prayed for by persons already carrying out this ministry. This succession of consecrations is what is most often thought of as episcopal succession, but more rightly should be seen as one form of episcopal succession, serving succession in apostolic mission.²⁶

58. In their desire to retain episcopal structures, the Reformers would also have preserved episcopal succession in all the described senses. Although succession in canonical episcopal ordinations was lost in much of continental Lutheranism, such succession was never rejected by the Lutheran Reformers. A succession of consecrations was retained in Sweden and Finland and preserved with only one interruption in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. In the twentieth century other Lutheran churches (e.g., in Estonia, Latvia, Tanzania, and El Salvador) have embraced such succession. Lutheran objections have been far less to episcopal succession than to certain claims made for it (see below, No. 59). Apart from these worries, Lutherans can recognize and welcome episcopal succession as one sign (among others) of the church's continuity in the one gospel and in the one pastoral ministry of that gospel (cf. "Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office," 11; "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry," 57).

Episcopal Ministry and the Identity of the Church

59. The ecumenically most controversial element in discussions about episcopacy is the relation between episcopal structures and

²⁶ Such a succession of consecrations is referred to in "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry," 57 as "the historic succession of bishops."

succession on the one hand and the identity of the church on the other. As noted above (50), Lutherans have insisted that the identity of the church is essentially constituted by word and sacraments and the divinely instituted ministry which serve these. An episcopal ministry of oversight in succession cannot be considered essential to the church's identity in the same sense, nor as essential to the identity of the office of ministry ("The Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office," 10). The apostolicity and continuity of the church in the gospel cannot be made a function of a succession of sees or consecrations. If a situation arises within some part of the church which forces a clear choice between adherence to a certain episcopal structure or succession on the one hand and fidelity to the gospel on the other, then the gospel must be chosen. Lutherans do not rule out the possibility that such a choice may be faced.

60. Lutherans do not believe that the preservation of any particular episcopal structure is a guarantee of unity or continuity in the gospel. The guidance of the Spirit is not so linked to any structure of church leadership that the presence of that structure is an infallible sign of the Spirit's leadership.

61. Lutherans have sometimes understood the claims made by other churches for episcopal structures and succession as if they were asserting what Lutherans were concerned to deny. Such an assumption should not be made without careful attention to and assessment of just what another church is claiming. They may not be claiming that episcopal structures and succession are essential to the identity of the church, but rather that they are indispensable in some other sense (e.g., indispensable to the coming into being of a future reunited church). These claims may be ones Lutherans have given little thought to or even which are difficult to state in the terms of traditional Lutheran theology.

62. Lutheran understanding of the claims made by other churches for episcopacy is too often hampered by an overly simple and rigid use of the concept of *adiaphora*. By means of this concept, a distinction is drawn between that which is universally and unconditionally essential for the identity of the church,

on the one hand, and all else (i.e., adiaphora), on the other. Whatever is not strictly essential is treated as human invention which can be reformed or dispensed with at will by any denomination or national church. Working with this distinction alone implies an *a priori* rejection of all claims that a practice or structure, while not unconditionally necessary to the identity of the church, is nevertheless normative for normal practice and dispensable only in situations of emergency. Both the present ecumenical challenges and the variety of understandings of episcopacy to be found within Lutheran history require a more differentiated understanding of the difference between the essential and the adiaphoral.²⁷

63. While individual proposals must be judged on their own terms and in their own situations, Lutherans should in principle welcome proposals for fellowship or union which include communion in episcopal ministry in succession but which do not imply that such a ministry is essential to the identity of the church or to the identity of the office of ministry. In principle, we can affirm the general outline of the proposal for mutual recognition of ministry in BEM, M 53.²⁸ We urge that serious and open consideration be given to ecumenical proposals related to episcopal ministry which in varying ways develop similar ideas in the context of particular ecumenical situations, such as the Anglican-Lutheran *Niagara Report* and the Lutheran-Roman Catholic text *Facing Unity*.

²⁷ See Michael Seils, *Lutheran Convergence? An Analysis of the Lutheran Responses to the Convergence Document "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission*, LWF Report 25 (1988), 165. Note the double-sided condemnation in FC, SD, X:30-31.

²⁸ "In order to achieve mutual recognition, different steps are required of different churches. For example: a) Churches which have preserved the episcopal succession are asked to recognize both the apostolic content of the ordained ministry which exists in churches which have not maintained such succession and also the existence

64. The unity and continuity of the church in the one apostolic gospel are gifts which God has promised and given to the church. The Spirit works through many means to preserve the church in the gospel: the Scriptures, the sacraments, the classical creeds and confessions, the witness to the truth by the saints and prophets of past and present. All of these are both signs and instruments by which we are led back to the one thing necessary.²⁹ A Lutheran concern with the nature of episcopal ministry must be an interest in its capacity to serve as a sign and instrument of unity and continuity in the mission of the gospel.

Conclusion

65. The Reformation was especially concerned with the evangelical freedom of the Christian and the church. Under the gospel the church is free both to do the new thing and to recapture old things. In relation to the ministry of ordained women and episcopal ministry, the Lutheran communion around the world is in transition, seeking practices and forms that will serve its divinely-given mission. We have here sought to register where we are now within this transition and to point our churches to the questions and challenges with which it confronts us. We each have our convictions about where we should be going and how we

in these churches of a ministry of *episkopé* in various forms. b) Churches without the episcopal succession, and living in faithful continuity with the apostolic faith and mission, have a ministry of Word and sacrament, as is evident from the belief, practice, and life of those churches. These churches are asked to realize that the continuity with the Church of the apostles finds profound expression in the successive laying on of hands by bishops and that, though they may not lack the continuity of the apostolic tradition, this sign will strengthen and deepen that continuity. They may need to recover the sign of the episcopal succession."

²⁹ See *Niagara Report*, 28-30.

should get there. We have stated some of those convictions that we hold in common. As in all transitions, however, our final trust is not in the strength of our convictions, the clarity of our analysis, or the wisdom of our advice, but in the Lord whom all ministry is called to serve, Jesus Christ, who, with the Father and the Spirit, is worthy of eternal praise.

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The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry

Statement on the basis of an LWF study project

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Some Definitions

1. The term *ministry* denotes the service to which the whole people of God is called, whether individually or corporately. This ministry is carried out through witness, worship and service to others both within the Christian communion and in the world. Thus every Christian may properly be called *minister*. Ministry finds concrete expression in a variety of *ministries* which often overlap - service in one's family, one's job, one's civic responsibility. Only a few of these ministries are part of the institutional life of the church, e.g. catechist, church musician, Sunday school teacher, pastor.
2. The term *ordained ministry* denotes that ministry within the church which Lutherans have called the ministry of word and sacrament, the pastoral office, the office of preaching. This is one of the institutional ministries but because it is essential for the church's life, it is unique among them. Persons ordained to this ministry in Lutheran churches are given such designations as pastor, priest, bishop, president, superintendent and dean.
3. The terms *episcopal ministry* and *episcopal office* denote the task of pastoral leadership and spiritual supervision. Persons exercising this task in Lutheran churches are called either bishops or by some other title.

I. The People of God

Foundation

1. "In a broken world God calls the whole of humanity to become God's people. For this purpose God chose Israel and then spoke in a unique and decisive way in Jesus Christ, God's Son. Jesus made his own the nature, condition and cause of the whole human race, giving himself as a sacrifice for all. Jesus' life of service, his death and resurrection, are the foundation of a new community which is built up continually by the good news of the gospel and the gifts of the sacraments. The Holy Spirit unites in a single body those who follow Jesus Christ and sends them as witnesses into the world. Belonging to the church means living in communion with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit" (BEM, M 1).

2. By the power of the Holy Spirit God calls people from the world by means of the gospel of Christ and, through baptism, establishes them as a community. Baptism incorporates each believer into the people of God's new covenant and makes of them a universal priesthood - an instrument of his loving purpose for the whole creation. Thus through the gospel and baptism God establishes a new relationship (reconciliation through justification) with those who believe, by forgiving their sin and giving them new life in the Holy Spirit (Rom 6:4-5; Titus 3:5). The reconciliation accomplished by God abides as the paradigm of the Christian life. Christians *have been* reconciled to God in Christ; they *are daily* reconciled to God in Christ (Small Catechism 3,12).

3. Christians then are a people to whom God has given the gifts of the Holy Spirit (*charismata*) to empower their common life and their mission in the world. This people is the church called to prefigure - however brokenly - and proclaim the coming kingdom of God (1 Pet 2:4-10). Empowered by the same Spirit Jesus received at his baptism, the baptized people of God are sent to

carry out Christ's ministry: to serve as Jesus served, to preach good news, to proclaim release to the captives, to set at liberty those who are oppressed - to be a sign of God's coming reign (Lk 4:18-19). The ministry of the people of God then is marked by a relationship between receiving and acting so intimate that giving becomes receiving and receiving becomes giving.

4. The ministry of God's people is so closely linked with the redemption and reconciliation effected by Christ's own ministry that through it Christ himself continues to work. Being reconciled with God, Christians are a community of reconciliation both forgiving one another (Eph 4:32) and being God's sign and instrument of reconciliation in the strife and tension of the world. The goal of this ministry is nothing less than the reconciliation of the whole creation (Rom 8:18ff).

Worship

5. Worship is the response of God's people to the great love revealed in the ministry of God's Son, Jesus Christ. It is doxology; the church's offering of praise and thanksgiving. In worship God's people not only respond to what God *has* accomplished in Christ, but also to what God is accomplishing through the continuing presence of Christ's ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. A service of worship manifests the interrelationship of receiving and giving already described (cf. 3 above), especially in the eucharist where praise, proclamation, giving, receiving and sharing all shape the liturgy.

6. The ministry of God's people is a ministry of worship. Christian identity established in baptism is reinforced and the community is empowered for its ministry in the world. Worship is the celebration and, thus, the proclamation of Christian hope, thereby exposing all other hopes and promises as penultimate. Worship is the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit as various mem-

bers of the assembly function in special roles. The ministry of worship becomes the communal and liturgical focus for the personal ministries of God's people which are thereby clarified and encouraged.

Witness

7. Witness is the response of God's people to the justifying and liberating action of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ sends his church into the world to proclaim this goodness of salvation to all people. This proclamation includes a variety of actions which declare God's will to gather a people through whom the plenitude of his love may flow. Such actions include witnessing to the gospel in the strictest sense - so that by hearing the world may believe, caring for God's creation, and advocating the ethics of God's kingdom - justice, peace, love.

8. The ministry of God's people is a ministry of witness. In that sense, the mandate and ministry of the apostles are continued. The gospel is proclaimed both in word and deed in the daily arena of life in the world. But the gospel is also proclaimed as the church prefigures the coming kingdom of God (cf. 3 above).

Service

9. Service is the response of God's people to the unlimited and unconditional love of their Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. Christians serve God, each other and the world through their ministries of worship and witness. But there is also that service which, for the love of God, simply responds to human need. Such acts of love are fundamental to the ministry of Jesus; they must be fundamental to that of his followers.

10. The ministry of God's people is a ministry of service. Motivated by the love of God, Christians respond to situations of personal need in their immediate context and to situations of

social need in their own country or in other parts of the world. They exercise such ministry directly without first calculating whether or not this ministry will be understood as an expression of God's love to all his creatures. Thus while the ministry of service may indeed be a witness, the desire to witness is not its motivation.

II. The Ministry

11. The ministry of the people of God is carried out in varying political, social and cultural contexts. In order to fulfill its ministry faithfully, the church will seek forms of worship, witness and service which are relevant in each situation.

12. The ministry of the people of God is actually one ministry, and its wholeness must be emphasized. Witness may not be pitted against worship or service - ministries of worship, witness and service are *aspects* of that ministry to which God has called his people. Through the church the whole gospel of Christ must come to bear on the whole human being as he or she participates in the whole community of the baptized performing its one ministry for the sake of the whole world.

Ministry and Ministries

13. Ministry is the function of the whole people of God because the foundation of the church's ministry is in the ministry of Christ made present to us in the gospel and the sacraments. Christian ministry cannot be the privilege of a special group or class within the church (priesthood of all believers). To speak of ministry, however, is to use an abstraction. The ministry of all people of God becomes real in particular *ministries* performed either corporately or individually.

14. From the concept of the priesthood of all believers it follows that individual ministries are determined by the context of one's life - family, job and civic relationships - and by the manifold gifts of the Holy Spirit. An individual will be involved, therefore, in several ministries simultaneously: e.g. mother, teacher, organist, town councilor, son, student, university professor, senator, Sunday school teacher. Each provides the opportunity to minister by one's style of life, concern for others, attitude of service, dedication to justice and equality, and one's explicit gospel witness (cf. BEM, M 5).

15. The ministries of most Christians are carried out primarily outside the life and activity of the institutional church. Thus they constitute the frontline of the church's ministry to the world. The most effective ministry of witness occurs most often in the context of personal relationships which frequently provide the initial contact with the community of faith. One reason why no Christian may delegate his or her ministry to someone else is that no one else stands in precisely the same context of relationships.

16. The corporate life of the people of God is another context for ministries: liturgical ministries as lectors, prayer-leaders, singers; teaching ministries of various kinds; youth leaders and parish assistants; diaconal ministries; pastoral and episcopal ministries. In some places ministries are part-time and occasional, in others they are full-time and become part of the regular life of the institutional church, often requiring periods of specialized training.

17. Whether institutional, whether exercised within the Christian community, or whether exercised in the world, all Christian ministries are concrete instances of that one ministry to which God has called the whole church.

III. The Ordained Ministry

Its Nature and Place within the One Ministry of the Church

18. A particular instance of the ministry to which all Christians have been called is the ordained ministry of word and sacrament. This ministry cannot exist in isolation from the ministry of all baptized believers; rather the relationship is one of interdependence. The ordained ministry exists to serve the Christian community and needs its support and encouragement. The community needs the leadership provided by the ordained ministry. Participatory and conciliar structures on all levels of church life provide for interaction and mutual responsibility.

19. The ordained ministry is not merely a practical arrangement for the orderly exercise of functions which really belong to the whole community; it is divinely instituted as the necessary instrument in the service of word and sacrament (CA 5). That is why the ordained ministry is essential to the life of the church: the church is constituted and lives by word and sacrament. Thus "the Church has the command to appoint ministers" (Apol. 13, 12).

20. The authority of the ordained ministry is rooted in Christ who received it from the Father. Jesus came to be set apart for service, and he made his apostles responsible for carrying on his ministry of service. To be ordained, then, means to be set apart for the service of the Christian community. Ordination inaugurates an authority not of status but of service. The service of those ordained centers in word and sacrament.

21. Ordained ministers stand both within the congregation and over against it. They stand with the whole people of God because all share in the one ministry of the church. They stand over against the congregation because in God's name they proclaim the saving gospel to God's people, and therefore bear the author-

ity of God's word - but only insofar as their proclamation is faithful to the gospel. The Christian community, therefore, has both the right and the duty to hold those ordained accountable in terms of their mandate. Thus a balance is created which prevents unilateral domination or dependence.

22. Not only are the ministries of the people of God complementary, they also share certain functions: one instance would be the exercise of oversight (*episcopé*) by parish councils or other groups; another would be the exercise of preaching or teaching ministries by lay persons. The complementary character of Christian ministries finds expression in mutual responsibility for community worship and through participation in various liturgical ministries (cf. 16 above).

Its Essential Task

23. Ordained ministers are to assemble and build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the word of God, presiding at the celebration of the sacraments, and guiding the community's ministries of worship, witness and service. Even though ordained ministers are engaged in the many different activities the daily exercise of their office requires, the center of them all is proclamation.

24. Within the many ministries of the people of God, the ordained ministry provides a focus of unity in that it publicly and constantly points to the church's fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ. Not only that, the ordained ministry is also a sign of the unity of the church beyond a specific Christian community since persons are ordained by the church at large, and their gospel-authority is recognized beyond their specific place of service (cf. 51 below). In both instances the unity of the church rests in its one Lord who continues to call persons to serve God's people through word and sacrament and, thus, to be instrumental in building up the community.

Its Diversification

25. There has always been a certain diversification of the ordained ministry. The specific historic and cultural situation influences the way in which ordained ministers understand and carry out their ministry. Although the ordained ministry of word and sacrament is constitutive for the church, it is always open for new actualizations which will make the ministry of the whole church more effective in given sets of circumstances. A static view of the ordained ministry would be inadequate for the church's continuing task of mission.

26. Already in the New Testament one encounters a variety of forms of ministry which existed at various times and in various places. Historically, this diversity coalesced into the threefold ordained ministry of bishop, presbyter (priest) and deacon. Though it has been adapted to many different historical situations, the threefold pattern is regarded by many Christian communions as fundamental. The Lutheran insistence that no such pattern may be regarded as essential for the church and, thus, a necessary condition for church union, is related to the particular shape and understanding of the threefold ministry which developed in the medieval church. But Lutherans remain committed to the search for an authentic understanding of episcopal ministry, presbyterial ministry and the service of the diaconate in the church.

27. In the concrete formation and organization of the ordained ministry, there is freedom for responsible restructuring. Current examples of diversification would be pastors serving local congregations or communions of congregations (deacons and bishops), hospital and university chaplains, missionaries of various kinds, evangelism specialists, administrators of certain church agencies, teachers of theology. The more such diversification distances a particular ministry from the service of word and sacrament, the more difficult it becomes to determine whether it belongs within or outside the sphere of ordained ministry. On the other hand,

acceptance of the principle of diversification entails recognition that service of word and sacrament is more central to some forms of ordained ministry than to others; not every ordained minister must perform all the functions or perform them in equal measure.

Its Episcopal Expression

28. Lutherans are agreed that the ordained ministry of the church is basically one ministry, centered on the proclamation of the word of God and the administration of the holy sacraments. This ministry embraces both the ministry of a pastor within and for a local community of believers and the episcopal ministry within and for a communion of local communities. The church is present in each local community of Christians gathered around word and sacrament. In their midst are persons ordained to serve them through word and sacrament and in other ways. The church is also manifest in the communion of local communities with one another. Such a communion of local communities calls a pastor to serve them collectively through an episcopal ministry. Therefore, Lutheran churches have continued this ministry of *episcopé* and have valued it.

29. Continuation of this office of pastoral leadership and spiritual supervision (*episcopé*) positions Lutheran churches in continuity with the practice of the church since the early centuries. Though various names have been applied to it, Lutherans have continued an episcopal ministry since the Reformation not only in faithfulness to the New Testament (especially the pastoral epistles) and in appreciation for the tradition of the church, but also because it meets obvious practical, pastoral and spiritual needs.

30. Episcopal ministry must be seen in the perspective of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; it is not described sufficiently by listing its functions. Through the call and induction into the episcopal office a new and wider responsibility is indeed given. Furthermore induction is a recognition of the gifts for this

ministry and a prayer to the Holy Spirit imploring the strength of God for the exercise of this ministry. Lutheran churches apply differing expressions or terms for this induction, and the terms may suggest differing underlying theological concepts. Even so, the differences are not regarded as divisive.

31. Lutheran churches have entrusted the episcopal ministry to persons whose titles and duties may differ. Episcopal ministry is also embodied in different church structures and may be related in various ways to collegiate or corporate structural entities. Such diversity, however, has never been regarded as divisive for the communion of the Lutheran churches, since Lutherans do not regard a uniform structure to be necessary for the church and its unity (cf. CA 7).

32. The current ecumenical discussion as well as recent developments within the Lutheran churches themselves should prompt Lutherans to re-examine their structures and their understanding of the episcopal ministry. At the same time the ecumenical discussion may be able to benefit from the Lutheran experience where diversity in the structure and exercise of the office of episcopal ministry have not imperiled Lutheran unity.

IV. Women in Ministries of the Church

33. The Lutheran concept of baptismal priesthood means that the life of every baptized believer is or should be a ministry. Baptism births a community of priests who are both women and men. Since various ministries are instances of the one ministry of Christ which is the responsibility of the whole church, and since men and women are equally members of the church by virtue of baptism, a very strong case would be required to disqualify women from any ministry. Gifts or their lack may disqualify someone from a particular ministry - not every member of Christ's body has the same function - but not gender.

34. If the question is put to Lutheran churches whether any ministries are closed to women, the answer is yes - at least in some churches.

35. There has seldom been a question about women exercising vocational ministries other than that of word and sacrament. But the line of argument in this statement necessarily leads to removing the question of gender from the discussion of ministry altogether, including the debate about the ordination of women. Whatever the particular ministry being considered, it should be the same ministry whether performed by a woman or a man. When men and women perform the same ministry, they give expression to the conviction that the whole of humanity should be embodied in the ministry of the church (cf. 39 below).

36. Ministries have always been dependent on cultural contexts even when they have been shaped in opposition to prevailing cultures. This is reflected in the New Testament church itself. When discussing the role of women in the church, St. Paul sides with the Old Testament and Jewish tradition in opposing other tendencies in the congregations he addresses (1 Cor 11:6). Why the Hebraic tradition differed from patterns in other oriental societies, why St. Paul asserted it (cf. 37 below), and what these choices signified in the context of a patriarchal structure which afforded women no leadership roles are questions the answers to which are perennially instructive for the church. Many Lutheran churches today live in patriarchal cultural contexts. Others, however, live in contexts where equality between women and men is established by law. If such churches close ministries to women, they run counter to their cultural norms and must ask themselves whether such opposition is for the sake of a clear witness to the gospel. (This paragraph should be seen together with the following.)

37. St. Paul is very clear when he concludes the discussion of faith and baptism in Galatians 3:28 by saying: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The church must not take refuge in the knowledge that it remains an imper-

fect reflection of the realities of God's kingdom, also in regard to distinctions among persons (1 Cor 7 and 11). The Pauline teaching on liberation by the gospel and equality in the body of Christ challenges it to reassess continually even practices regarding ministry which carry the approbation of centuries.

38. The very practice of the church should exemplify and confer inclusive participation. The church is both a community of faith and an organization. Churches employ women in large numbers whose experience frequently is that the actual practice of their church discriminates against them. It is therefore necessary to examine continuously the church's practices as employer in the light of its theological convictions about equality as well as the psychological, sociological and other organizational factors which influence the life and witness of the church. As an increasing number of women enter church employment, the discussion is intensified about how traditional work patterns could be changed to make room for a full family life, and to allow experiments which would lead to a fuller appreciation of all ministries.

39. Many women feel strongly that they do not want to enter the ordained ministry as it is today. They are looking for a renewal of the pastoral office and of other ministries particularly in areas of authority and decision making.

40. Concerning the ordination of women, the question must be: Is there any reason why women may not be ordained, i.e., that they may not occupy the pastoral office? On the basis both of their participation in the baptismal priesthood, and of the reasons given for the ordained ministry in this statement, the assumption should be that the pastoral ministry is open to women just as it is to men. Most of the large Lutheran churches have decided to ordain women, and approximately 75% of Lutherans worldwide now belong to churches with both female and male pastors. In most of these churches the change to an inclusive ministry has taken place without significant controversies.

41. The issue of the ordination of women is an element in several ecumenical conversations.

"Differences on this issue raise obstacles to the mutual recognition of ministries. But those obstacles must not be regarded as substantive hindrance for further efforts towards mutual recognition. Openness to each other holds the possibility that the spirit may well speak to one church through the insights of another. Ecumenical consideration, therefore, should encourage, not restrain, the facing of this question" (cf. BEM, M 54).

42. Accepting women into the pastoral ministry may seem to concern directly only a small number of church members. For many, however, it has become the symbol of women and men as equal.

43. Women in the church's ministries will increasingly bring out from their life experiences new perspectives on the exercise of these ministries. This may represent one of the most significant sources of the church's enrichment and hope.

V. Commissioning and Ordination

44. In foregoing sections the one ministry of the church is described which is exercised in diverse ministries - some are voluntary or part-time, others full-time; some require special training and/or qualifications, others do not; some are officially conferred, others are assumed informally. All, if they are legitimate ministries of the church, are related to the essential ministry of word and sacrament (cf. 14 above).

45. The liturgies by which the church confers various ministries have certain elements in common: calling, blessing, sending. This signifies that these ministries together serve the same Lord in the one church. But there are also differences: Scripture readings and liturgical formulas differ according to the type of service and

responsibility. In the liturgy of ordination a ministry of word and sacrament is conferred, the essential and central ministry of the church. In liturgies of commissioning other ministries are conferred. Ordination is not repeated, commissioning is frequently repeated each time a person is called to a new ministry.

46. All those who exercise the ministry of word and sacrament in the church should be called and ordained whether or not they will serve full-time or be involved in a "professional" pastoral ministry. Ministers of word and sacrament need the approbation of the church and the promise of the Holy Spirit which ordination confers, and the congregations in which they serve need the assurance of the public promise of faithfulness and accountability which ordination require.

47. Ordination to the ministry/office of word and sacrament is an action by God and the church. It is administered in a public act of worship of the people of God. In it the church recognizes God's initial calling into the ordained ministry, all previous training and personal gifts (*vocatio*). Ordination gives authority publicly to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments according to Christ's command and promise, for the purpose of the continuance of the apostolic life and mission of the church (*missio*). The church as a community of the faithful promises its support and, trusting in God's promise, confidently prays for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) for the performance of this office (*benedictio*). Accordingly ordination is administered with prayer and the laying on of hands, especially by those who occupy an office of pastoral leadership and spiritual supervision (*episcopé*), and of unity in the church.

48. Ordination is for life. It is not to be repeated, even if the persons ordained have ceased to exercise their ministry during a certain period. Ordination is not repeated because of God's faithfulness to his unlimited promise to strengthen and sustain those ordained in their life and ministry through his Holy Spirit. Ordination, therefore, remains a continuing point of reference for

reassurance and affirmation, especially in times of doubt and weariness. It is a reminder to ordained ministers that the Lord of the church wills to work through weak and fallible human beings.

49. Because ordination is a calling into pastoral leadership (*episcopé*) through word and sacrament in the church of Jesus Christ, those ordained share responsibility for the whole church (*oikumene*). This constitutes the catholic and ecumenical dimensions of the ordained ministry.

50. Ordinands promise to serve on the basis and under the norm of Holy Scripture and in accordance with the Lutheran confessions which include the Creeds of the early church. Such a service has to be exercised within the tension and complexities of modern societies and with a deep concern for human beings. Accordingly, requirements for ordination include a personal awareness of a call from the Lord, which must be authenticated by the church and an adequate and accountable preparation in accordance with the respective socio-cultural situation and in view of competence to exercise a ministry with word and sacraments, teaching, pastoral care, spiritual leadership. Spiritual, intellectual and personal qualities are required which are commensurate with the task of the ordained ministry. Before ordination a time of practice, experience and testing should be foreseen. After ordination continuing education is needed for the competent exercise of the ministry.

51. Ordination and the appointment to a full-time position in the church are not necessarily linked together (cf. 24 above). But ordination should always be linked to a concrete place or area of ministry.

52. Ordination is not an act of separation from the other members of the church, nor does it impart a special personal quality or a higher status. Rather, it is a calling, blessing and sending for a God-given ministry in the midst of and for the people of God. It involves the whole person. Therefore, the task of the service in the ordained ministry of the church and the witness through the life of the ordained cannot be separated.

53. Although ordination is a mandate to specific persons, this does not isolate them as individuals. To be ordained means to be set into a certain spiritual discipline and to share common responsibilities with all who serve in the ordained ministry. In this fellowship those ordained find mutual consolation and support, and together they express the collegial character of their ministry.

VI. Apostolic Succession

54. "Apostolic tradition in the Church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each" (cf. BEM, M 34).

55. Lutherans can agree with this formulation as an adequate description of what usually is called *apostolic succession*. Their own confessions claim to stand in the authentic apostolic and catholic tradition, and underline the historical continuity of the church which has neither been interrupted nor broken. As a consequence, Lutheran churches regard their ordained ministries as a valid ministry of the means of grace.

56. Lutherans also agree that it is a task of the ordained ministry to serve this continuity and to express it through an orderly transmission of the ordained ministry. At the time of the Reformation the particular pattern of such transmission - succession in episcopal sees and ordination by bishops - was preserved in some Lutheran churches and abandoned in others, because the bishops then and there would not allow freedom for the proclamation of the gospel as the Reformers understood it

and for certain reforms in accordance with it. In this emergency Lutheran churches claimed a right for the whole church and each congregation to see to it that ministers of the gospel were ordained. Also in this way an orderly transmission of the ordained ministry was maintained.

57. There is, therefore, nothing in the Lutheran tradition against a succession of bishops which serves, symbolizes and guards the continuity of the apostolic faith and communion (cf. BEM, M 36), but which cannot be regarded as a guarantee of the continuity and unity of the church (cf. BEM, M 38). Lutherans can be open to the historic succession of bishops as a sign of the apostolicity of the life of the whole church (cf. BEM, M 38) and a step towards greater unity with Christian communions, provided that by doing so there is no doubt cast on the validity of the ministry exercised in their churches so far (cf. BEM, M 38).

This statement mirrors the current understanding of ministry in Lutheran churches. But the task is a continuing one which requires further reflection in company with our ecumenical partners on such points as women in the ministries of the church and the traditional threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon.

Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office

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I. Basic Considerations on Episcopal Ministry

1. All ordained ministries in the church, including the episcopal office of pastoral leadership and spiritual supervision (*episcopé*)¹ are founded in the mission of Jesus Christ. Through his life, death and resurrection he reconciled all people with God. The Holy Spirit leads people to believe in this reconciliation given freely, without conditions. All ordained ministries in the church are sent by Christ to proclaim and celebrate this Good News, which is for all people.
2. An understanding of episcopal ministry must be sought within the more comprehensive concept of ordained ministry, and the understanding of ordained ministry must be sought within the still more comprehensive concept of the church, God's people on earth, which is at once universal and local (congregation, region or nation).
3. The whole church (including all its ministries) has a twofold vocation - being called *and* being sent, receiving *and* giving, listening *and* proclaiming - for which the ordained ministry bears special responsibility.

¹ In this text we use throughout the terms *episcopal ministry* and *episcopal office* as referring to the task of pastoral leadership and spiritual supervision. Persons exercising this task in Lutheran churches are called either bishops or by some other title.

4. The church which is both universal and local is present in each community of Christians gathered around word and sacrament. In the local community persons are ordained to serve through word and sacrament and in other ways. The universal church is also manifest in the communion of local communities with one another. Such a communion of local communities calls a pastor to serve them collectively through an episcopal ministry. Therefore, Lutheran churches have continued this ministry of *episcopé* and have valued it (cf. 18 below).

5. Continuation of the office of pastoral leadership and spiritual supervision (*episcopé*) positions Lutheran churches in continuity with the practice of the church since the early centuries. Though various names have been applied to it, Lutherans have continued an episcopal ministry since the Reformation, not only in appreciation for the tradition of the church, but also because it meets obvious pastoral, spiritual and practical needs.

6. Lutherans are agreed that the ordained ministry of the church is basically one ministry, centered on the proclamation of the word of God and the administration of the holy sacraments. This ministry embraces both the ministry of a pastor within and for a local community of believers and the episcopal ministry within and for a communion of local communities.

7. Lutheran churches have entrusted the episcopal ministry to persons whose titles and duties may differ. Episcopal ministry is also embodied in different church structures and may be related in various ways to collegiate or corporate structural entities. Such diversity, however, has never been regarded as divisive for the communion of the Lutheran churches, since Lutherans do not regard a uniform structure to be necessary for the church and its unity (cf. CA 7). The current ecumenical discussion as well as recent developments within the Lutheran churches themselves should prompt Lutherans to re-examine their structures and their understanding of the episcopal ministry. At the same time the ecumenical discussion may be able to benefit from the Lutheran experience where diversity in the structure and exercise of the office of episcopal ministry have not imperiled Lutheran unity.

8. Episcopal ministry must be seen in the perspective of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; it is not described sufficiently by listing its functions. Through the call and induction into the episcopal office a new and wider responsibility is indeed given. Furthermore induction is a recognition of the gifts for this ministry and a prayer to the Holy Spirit imploring the strength of God for the exercise of this ministry. Lutheran churches apply differing expressions or terms for this induction, and the terms may suggest differing underlying theological concepts. Even so, the differences are not regarded as divisive.

9. The Lutheran churches today stand in unbroken succession of the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ through word and sacrament. They regard this ministry as serving the apostolic continuity of the church. At the time of the Reformation an orderly transmission of this ministry through episcopal ordination was no longer possible in some countries. In this emergency Lutheran churches claimed a right for the whole church and each congregation to see to it that ministers of the gospel were ordained. Lutheran churches are agreed that continuity in and faithfulness to the apostolic faith are more important than a formal succession of episcopal ordinations.

10. As a consequence, Lutheran churches regard their ordained ministries as a valid ministry of the means of grace. The historic succession of bishops is not regarded by them as necessary for the apostolic continuity of the church. Lutherans welcome, however, the recent ecumenical convergence in understanding apostolic succession. It is much more comprehensive than that presented in earlier statements. Apostolic succession is now generally understood as continuity in the apostolic faith and mission through proclamation and witness, celebrating the sacraments, worship, service to the needy and an orderly transmission of ministerial responsibility. This ecumenical convergence expresses theological convictions which are also essential for the Lutheran position (cf. BEM, M 34 and M 35; *The Ministry in the Church*, 3.4).

11. Lutheran churches, moreover, can be open to the historic succession of bishops and can see in it a sign of and service to the continuity and unity of the church (cf. BEM, M 38). Such an openness is seen within the Lutheran communion itself where some churches have retained or accepted the historic succession of bishops without this becoming divisive (cf. the common basic convictions in 9 and 10 above).

12. Active participation of Lutheran churches in ecumenical dialogue and encounter has resulted in new insights concerning the understanding and practice of episcopal ministry in our churches. Further study of the meaning of the episcopal office in dialogue with other Christian World Communions is still necessary.

13. The Consultation used the report of the Roman Catholic-Lutheran Joint Commission, *The Ministry in the Church* and the section "Ministry" in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* which together with the papers presented to the Consultation have proved to be very fruitful for the exchange.

II. Responsibilities and Functions of the Episcopal Office

14. The church elects ordained ministers to the episcopal office of leadership and spiritual supervision (*episcopé*) giving them special tasks and responsibilities for the life of the church, and for the spiritual health of the congregations and all their co-workers. Their fundamental task is to proclaim the gospel in its purity and administer the sacraments according to the gospel (cf. CA 17). Furthermore they are called to pray and work for the unity of the church and the salvation of the world.

15. From this fundamental task derives the special authority which they share with other bishops and co-workers called to corresponding tasks. Their authority "is a power or command of God to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments" (CA 28). Such authority always "has the character of responsibility before God and is exercised with the cooperation of the whole community" (BEM, M 15). As is true of all ordained ministers the bishops "manifest and exercise the authority of Christ in the way Christ himself revealed God's authority to the world" (BEM, M 16). In their endeavor to follow Christ's example, they become the servants of the servants of God. Together they share responsibility in collegial consultation, advice and support.

16. From this fundamental task of proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments, which is the common task of all ordained ministries, the following special duties of episcopal ministries derive. Persons in episcopal ministries are called to exercise leadership in the church by:

17. - advising and supporting the congregations in their life of worship, witness and service, by visiting them, listening to their needs, responding to their questions and helping to solve their problems;
- enabling Christian faith to grow in the church and in the life of all its members;
- assuring that the teaching of the church is in harmony with the gospel as interpreted in the confessions of the church and to warn against false teaching and help people in their struggle against it;
- to speak out and express the mind of the church in matters of public concern like justice and peace;
- planning and soliciting support for mission outreach both in the church and in the world;
- ordaining pastors or by authorizing others to ordain, and serving pastors as a pastor;

- being involved in approving, training, calling and placing of pastors, and in concern for the situation and tasks of other church workers;
- exercising discipline according to the church's requirement, correcting what is amiss in the life of congregations and the life of pastors;
- carrying out the decisions of the church as its constitutions prescribe and thereby assuming certain administrative tasks;
- advising and supporting institutions that are providing public and diaconal services in the name of the church;
- expressing and serving the unity of the church in relating to other churches and to confessional and ecumenical organizations;
- representing the church in the public sector.

18. As indicated above, those who exercise an episcopal ministry are called - together with other responsibilities - to serve the unity of the church. They represent the larger church to congregations committed to their charge. They represent the communion of these congregations within and to the larger church. They should bring ecumenical concerns to the attention of pastors and congregations through their preaching, teaching and other pastoral contacts.

19. The functions and duties enumerated above are exercised neither exclusively nor in isolation by persons in episcopal office. Many are exercised also by pastors in the context of local congregations. Others belong more specifically to the episcopal office or are conditioned by its particular place, role and responsibility. Such differences, however, do not create gradations of status in the one ministry instituted by Christ.

20. A convergence can be observed between the concept of episcopal office which emerges from this statement's description of the duties and responsibilities of episcopal ministers, and that which emerges from recent ecumenical statements:

"Bishops preach the Word, preside at the sacraments, and administer discipline in such a way as to be representative pastoral ministers of oversight, continuity and unity in the Church. They have pastoral oversight of the area to which they are called. They serve the apostolicity and unity of the Church's teaching, worship and sacramental life. They have responsibility for leadership in the church's mission. They relate the Christian community in their area to the wider Church, and the universal Church to their community. They, in communion with the presbyters and deacons and the whole community, are responsible for the orderly transfer of ministerial authority in the Church" (BEM, M 29);

and:

"We are, therefore, confronted with the empirical fact that in both churches there are local congregational ministries (priest, pastor) as well as also superordinated regional ministries. These regional ministries have the function of pastoral supervision and of service of unity within a larger area. These functions are connected with the commission to preach, administer the sacraments and lead the congregation, and involve teaching and doctrinal discipline, ordination, supervision, church order and in western Catholic practice (which in this respect, however, is clearly different from that of the Eastern as well as Lutheran churches) also confirmation. These tasks are entrusted to local ministries only in exceptional circumstances. In the two churches there thus exists a significant convergence as regards the actual character of ecclesial practice" (*The Ministry in the Church*, 44).

21. Cultural factors have influenced and continue to influence how episcopal ministry is understood and exercised in a given place. One may expect to find prevailing social and civil concepts and arrangements reflected in the structures of the church.

22. Cultural factors will also have a bearing on how episcopal functions are shared. Some may be delegated personally by the bishop - and some may be constitutionally assigned to rep-

representative assemblies, advisory groups, or other bodies. So long as the functions are cared for, a certain variety of practice in sharing them should constitute no problem.

23. In many Lutheran churches the episcopal ministry is so structured that it is difficult to fulfill the specific episcopal duties and responsibilities. In rectifying those situations the following modifications and changes deserve consideration: e.g. an episcopal ministry should be related to a clearly defined place (diocese, district, region), and the number of congregations included should make pastoral and spiritual leadership possible; offices in the church which exercise some or all functions of episcopal office, either constitutionally or by delegation, should receive full recognition as episcopal offices; persons in an episcopal office should receive adequate administrative assistance with regard to administrative duties.

24. In some Lutheran churches the episcopal office is for life, in others it is for a specific term. Term tenures permit more frequent matching of particular gifts and personalities with the changing needs of an area. On the other hand, term tenures may disrupt desirable continuity or inhibit the prophetic or judging aspects of the episcopal ministry.

It is hoped that these basic agreements and perspectives serve as a framework and encouragement to further and necessary reflection on episcopal ministry in individual Lutheran churches, within the Lutheran communion and in dialogue with sister churches.

Women in the Ministries of the Church

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I. Understanding Ministry

The Lutheran Concept of Priestly Ministry

The concept of priestly ministry derives from baptism and thus applies to all Christians. No baptized person may be exempted from inclusion in the priesthood of all believers. To extend the priesthood to include the entire group is, from the standpoint of religion in general, a revolutionary idea. While Old Testament priests formed a special caste within the people of Israel, the Old Testament also reveals a concept of the whole people as priestly in character (Ex 19:6, Is 61:6), the germ of the New Testament concept.

It is often pointed out how seldom the word "priest" occurs in the New Testament. This New Testament reticence is remarkable in a world very conscious of priesthood of various kinds and their authoritative position in society. Never is the term "priest" used in the New Testament for those who later would be considered clergy: disciples, apostles, etc. The New Testament abandons a clerical or cultic concept of priesthood in favor of an ethical concept. The whole people is "a holy priesthood" whose vocation it is "to offer spiritual sacrifices *acceptable to God* through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5), or again the people is a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9). In Revelation, the term is used of individuals (1:6, 5:10, 20:6), but obviously as a group, not individually.

In the New Testament we find a concept of service or ministry which is cast in terms of priesthood and sacrifice - terms which the whole biblical tradition transforms from the realm of cult to the realm of ethics: "I appeal to you ... by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1).

That the concept of sacrifice in Paul is not cultic is signaled by the adjective *living*. The remainder of chapter 12 speaks of forms of ministry or service, all of which have love as their chief motivation. One cannot, therefore, take refuge from love's demands of service in formalistic cultic observance.

The priestly view of the Christian community and the cognate sacrificial view of Christian ministry bear the stamp of the future. They are eschatologically conditioned. To speak about priesthood and sacrifice is to speak the language of faith. It is to apply the dynamics of the kingdom to life now. Christians should serve others as people who have died to the world and are alive in Christ. Prevailing cultural concepts of human interaction and social responsibility, therefore, may not be applied uncritically to the church and its ministry. Everything should be scrutinized in the light of Christ, of faith, of the eschaton.

The New Testament concept of the Christian community as "a people for God's possession" (1 Pet 2:9) is of importance also. The Greek word for people is *laos*, from which the term laity is derived. All Christians belong to the laity; laity means the people of God. Just as all Christians are members of the priesthood, so all Christians are members of the laity.

The common usage in the Greco-Roman city-state, however, led to a division between laity and clergy, and, in time, to a distinction of class. For the offices of bishop and presbyter (and deacon) to have developed into a separate ruling class in the church clearly violates New Testament teaching.

The growing clericalization of the church was the result both of cultural factors and theological development. By the time of the Reformation the clergy were thought of as an authoritarian caste

with only formal ties to a community. Their ordination was absolute (i.e., not tied to a community of believers) and conferred the power of consecration of the eucharist. The clerical church expected obedience and minimal participation in the sacramental system from the laity. Real Christians - those who lived according to the "superior ethic" of the gospel - were thought to be the clergy and, especially, monastics, both women and men. Christian vocation could only be spoken of in connection with such people's lives. In practice the line between the world and Christianity was no longer drawn at baptism, but at religious profession.

Luther's concepts of vocation and the priesthood of all believers are argued against the prevailing medieval Catholicism. In the New Testament Luther encounters the concept of the Christian life as service that he sees to be the true exercise of priesthood. His theological contribution lies in making explicit the implicit biblical connection between priestly service and baptism: baptism is ordination. If all Christians constitute a priesthood (1 Pet 2:5,9), and if God makes people Christians in baptism, then baptism is ordination to the priesthood: "This is a spiritual priesthood held in common by all Christians, through which we are all priests with Christ" ("The Misuse of the Mass", 1521, 138).

The baptismal fountain from which the priesthood concept flows is the best safeguard against an individualist perversion of the priesthood concept. It would be clearer to speak either of "the priesthood of all *baptized* believers," or of "the priesthood of the whole church" (Kraemer).

The Reformation concept of priesthood suggests a sacrificial concept of vocation. Our sacrifice, says St. Paul, is ourselves. That makes Christian priesthood total; it encompasses all of life and extends to every authentic aspect of creation. Luther has expanded the ideals of monastic life to the life of every Christian. But his concept was not a mere changing of church discipline or social practice; it was deeply rooted in his theology of justifica-

tion and, thus, in his teaching on baptism. That was the way back to a view which was again compatible with primitive Christian convictions and practice where Christian service is in and for the world (cf. *The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry*, 13-17).

The Lutheran Concept of Pastoral Ministry

The Lutheran concept of priestly ministry logically suggests a functional understanding of pastoral¹ ministry. Luther lends support to such a view in his polemics. But he acknowledges an ordained ministry as a special servanthood; he sees the call to that ministry as crucial.

What distinguishes pastors from other Christians is that they occupy a specific office, namely "to preach the word of God and administer the sacraments." People already priests by virtue of their baptism are called to this pastoral office by the church.

The Augsburg Confession affirms the tradition that the pastoral or ordained ministry has its origin in Christ or in God (CA 5). The calling and sending of the apostles by Jesus has been seen by the church as the origin of the office of the pastoral ministry. Luther takes a similar forthright view: God "wants to work through tolerable, kind, and pleasant means, which we ourselves could not have chosen better. He has, for instance, a godly and kind man speak to us, preach, lay his hands on us, remit sin, baptize, give us bread and wine to eat and to drink... God commanded it, ordered it, instituted it, and ordained it; he himself is present and will do every thing himself" (*On the Councils and the Church*, 1539, 171).

¹ Some Lutherans call pastors priests. Here "priest" is used in the way Luther spoke of "priesthood of believers" and "pastor" refers to the ordained ministry of word and sacrament.

Not only does Luther affirm the divine origin of the pastoral ministry, he also expresses the concept that the pastors perform their ministry of word and sacrament as instruments of Christ (at least akin to the Roman Catholic concept of *in persona Christi*).

Problem of Ministries in the Church

The Lutheran understanding of priestly and pastoral ministries may be applied to the problem of ministries, as follows:

- Ministry means carrying forward the work of Christ in the world.
- Ministry thus comprises proclamation (*martyria*) and loving service (*diakonia*) and, for the church, worship (*leiturgia*).
- The ministry of the church is the priestly service of the whole people of God to which they are called by the gospel and "ordained" in holy baptism.
- Since baptism initiates people into an eschatological community (a sign of God's coming kingdom), the ethics and standards of the priestly ministry are those not of the "world" but of the kingdom.
- The ministry of the church is, in practice, carried out in a variety of ministries, some formal and institutional but most of them informal and more spontaneous.
- Work performed for the welfare of the human community is included in one's ministry; such work often is in the nature of *diakonia*. No distinction is possible for the Christian between ministry and a "secular occupation."
- Personal ministries of proclamation/witness and service are largely determined by the context of one's life; they are vocationally and societally determined.

- One vocation in the church is unique and necessary to its own life, growth and well-being: the pastoral ministry of word and sacrament.
- This ministry is related to that of the apostles and has its origins in Christ's command. Thus, the pastoral ministry is of divine origin.
- The church has the duty to maintain the pastoral office and to call qualified people into it, but it does not thereby become the church's office. It remains an office of that word which is sovereign over the church.
- The context of certain Christians' ministry, therefore, is the pastoral office. Ordination does not give them superior status; they continue in their baptismal status as priests. But ordination gives them a special function: the ministry of word and sacrament. To them is entrusted the public or external ministry of the church, and they become symbols of the whole church in that sense.
- But ultimate authority remains with God's word; it does not devolve upon the pastor or the office. The pastoral ministry exists to serve the church by serving the gospel.
- As servants of the gospel, pastors have a ministry of leadership in the congregations. They serve having the authority of the word, but that authority is always subject to testing by the whole church which shares responsibility for the authenticity of its public proclamation.

The traditional concept of pastoral ministry is prevented by the Reformation concept of priestly ministry from becoming autonomously authoritarian and/or a clerical caste within the church. On the other hand the concept of priestly ministry is protected by that of pastoral ministry from becoming merely egalitarian on the model of current concepts of democracy and equal rights.

II. Women in the Ministries of the Church: Situation Analysis

The Ordained Ministry

Most of the large Lutheran churches have decided to ordain women to the pastoral ministry during the last two decades. A recent survey carried out by the LWF on this issue indicates that the standpoints of the Lutheran community in the world today can be characterized as follows:

- there are churches which have *decided to ordain women*, where women are exercising the pastoral ministry with general acceptance,
- there are churches which have discussed the question of the ordination of women and taken an official decision *against* it,
- there are churches where women are ordained, but where the *discussion* continues because part of the church does not accept female pastors,
- there are churches where the question of the ordination of women has *not yet* been seriously raised and the discussion has hardly started.

All these different positions have to be kept in mind when discussing the issue of women's ordination.

One question in this context is whether the Lutheran churches should accept this variety of positions, or whether it may be possible to find a solution which can be regarded as *the Lutheran* position in regard to the significance of gender in the pastoral ministry.

The experiences of Lutheran churches seem to indicate that it will be impossible to reach a complete consensus. However, the experience in most churches is that the change from male ministry to an inclusive one has taken place smoothly.

Only in the Nordic churches in Europe has the discussion been impassioned and led to a clear polarization. The Swedish Lutheran church decided to ordain women 25 years ago, but the struggle has continued ever since. In Finland the discussion has gone on as long, and women are still not ordained.

Experience has shown that the churches do not reach consensus through theological studies and debates alone, especially in an area where biblical interpretations, traditions and personal belief of a variety of church members form complicated patterns. There is also a need for looking at positive experiences with ways of practical implementation of changes.

Experiences of women pastors indicate that the problems are not always solved by ordination. Although many (most?) women pastors enjoy full acceptance on the part of the congregations and the coworkers, some of them encounter difficulties. In the worst cases, they may be boycotted by male coworkers, congregational committees or a part of the congregation who refuse to cooperate with the female pastor. In many cases, women experience disadvantages in career development. They are kept in functions with less status and responsibility.

Why the question is important

The acceptance of women into the pastoral ministry involves only a small number of church members directly. However, as the discussion goes on, it has for many women and men become the symbol of acceptance of women as equal human beings by the church. It also has religious connotations - since for some people it has even come to mean acceptance or non-acceptance of women before God.

In principle, acceptance of the ordination of women, even in situations where there are not many women to be ordained, is an important sign of accountability to the gospel. Refusal of female ordination would be evidence that there is a part in the life and the mission of the church which is not meant for all.

Why women should be ordained

Nothing can be found in the Bible or in the confessions of the Lutheran churches which directly demands the inclusion of women in the pastoral ministry. On the contrary, it is easy to find arguments against it.

On the other hand, proclamation of the equality of all people on the basis of baptism (Gal 3:26f) is so essential that it is very problematic for the church to hold on to practices against it.

As the basic mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel, the church should not exclude any members from discharging this ministry only on the basis of sex. Therefore the question should no longer be asked whether women should be ordained, but the question should rather be whether there is any reason why women may not be ordained?

Renewal of this Ministry?

Many women, as they struggle with their conviction of having been called to serve in the pastoral ministry, have come to feel that they do not want to enter the ministry as it is today. Over the centuries a kind of male ministry has been developed with hierarchical authority structures which many women as well as many men do not consider to be in accordance with the servant image of the gospel. These women are looking for a renewal of the ministry.

In any case, inclusion of women into the pastoral ministry may in itself help to change the one-sided father images and develop more fully human forms of the ordained ministry.

Other Ministries

God is determined to care perpetually for the whole of creation. Through baptism God calls and enables persons to participate in this perpetual care. Ministry is this co-enabling of the baptized as the stewards of God's mysteries. Ministry belongs to the whole people of God. But two questions arise - to what extent are the ministries fulfilling this function in the church? What concrete forms should or could the ministries take?

The ministry of the church is exercised by the whole people of God, and not simply by those who have been ordained to the office of the pastoral ministry or called to special tasks within the church.

A study of the ministry should begin by considering how the whole baptized people of God - female and male - old and young, the unschooled and the educated - are called to be ministers through the empowering event of their baptism.

Parallel to the ordained persons in the churches there is another much larger group which is formed by non-ordained persons, academically and vocationally trained, working in full or part-time positions, as wage earning persons, salaried employees or as civil servants in a lifelong position. This group is much larger than that of the clergy. A census in the Evangelical Church in Germany in the seventies showed that in addition to 15,000 clergy persons there was a staff of 215,000 persons in the diaconal and ecclesiastical services. Those figures give an impression of the importance of this second group. 70% of them are female which means that more than 150,000 women are thus employed by the churches.

There is also a third category of unpaid volunteers such as Sunday School teachers, church wardens, sextons, choir leaders, persons collecting the offerings and distributing the eucharist etc. There is no life in a congregation without persons who do some-

thing voluntarily for the love of their neighbors, for delight in the gospel, for the honor of the Lord and the building up of the community. In the German churches more than 70% of this group of volunteers also consists of women.

It is characteristic of these different ministries in the non-ordained categories that they are very frequently performed by women. This reflects the activity of women at grass-root levels in the church where they, according to the available data, account for more than half of the active persons, in most cases considerably more.

It is also characteristic that very frequently the ministries in the second and third categories are so-called low-status positions. This then, in different ways, affects the women carrying out a ministry in the church. It means that they often get no remuneration for their work, although the time spent may be quite substantial. When they are formally employed, the types of jobs that are available seldom reach the top of the salary scale in that church. It also means that they often have little part in the decision-making process - not even as far as their own working situation is concerned and least in the decisive stages.

In the churches where women are not ordained, there is often what appears to be a discrepancy between the tasks actually carried out by women and the reasons given for not ordaining them: Unordained women frequently teach and preach, although ordination is denied them. In certain mission organizations there is a discrepancy between what women do on the missionary field and what they are allowed to do in their home churches.

III. Factors Which Influence Practice

Theology

Since the middle of the 19th century Lutheran churches in many countries have found themselves in rapidly changing societies. The church was forced to re-examine the traditional concepts of society, family and its own order, which often turned out to be intimately linked with disappearing structures of society.

In the same process it was discovered that even the texts of the New Testament were influenced by the cultural context. One of the main tasks of theology then became the need to point out the understanding of humanity and human relations which is implied in the gospel itself - and should therefore be defended and implemented in every age.

As far as *church* structures are concerned (i.e., in the field of its own jurisdiction and authority), the church has to go as far in its re-examination and renewal as is possible, according to its understanding of the implications of the gospel. As far as social structures are concerned, the church should support those efforts which more or less correspond to the Christian understanding of human relations.

In the course of time the churches everywhere undergo different stages in discussion of the role of women in the church. This process seems to be rather similar in different churches and they therefore have much to learn from each other's findings. Ecumenical sharing is thus most helpful.

In the Lutheran churches there are many different theological approaches among theologians and other church members. In some countries the question of the ordination of women has become a heated issue in which fundamental disagreements concerning the interpretation of the Bible, ecclesiology, ministry anthropology and the relationship of the church to society culminate.

However, most Lutheran theologians agree on the so-called historical-critical interpretation of the Bible, which means that the context of each individual text gives a key for understanding the original intention of the text. It also means that different texts carry different values. There are texts which are essential for understanding the gospel and central aspects of the Christian faith, and there are texts which are ethical rules and behavioral regulations reflecting the social system of the time of the biblical authors.

It has already been mentioned that one of the basic texts in the Bible speaks of the equality of all people before God on the basis of baptism as expressed in Galatians 3:26-28. In baptism all people are incorporated into the community of reconciliation, which breaks down all barriers between different groups, social classes and also sexes, and questions the power structures of this world.

Jesus' radical teaching on a new order of values where the last come first and the first last is forever a challenge to the churches to evaluate their structures anew.

By admitting women to the ordained ministry the Lutheran churches realized the "Magna Charta" in Galatians 3:26-28 as far as the question of gender is concerned.

Rapid social change has called into question the traditional roles and positions of women and men. It is primarily within the last 20 years that theologians have seriously reacted to this. One of the reasons is perhaps that their interest focused primarily on the human relations within the family - and the family was and still is regarded as the place of stability and stabilization in a changing world. Only with the issue of women in the ministries of the church, especially the question of women's ordination, did the challenge become such that the church could no longer avoid it. Against this background the debate cannot focus exclusively on ecclesiology but has to include the whole area of anthropology and ethics.

The matter of women in the ministries of the church is also basically an anthropological issue. It implies Christian recognition of humanity as male and female, and a community of equal rights between men and women in church, family and society.

This issue is difficult to deal with exegetically. The texts on roles and relationships of women and men in the Bible reflect values of the patriarchal societies at the times when Bible texts originated. There is in fact the same difficulty when reading the texts of Luther. He rejects the idea of women in the pastoral ministry as being inconsistent with the reality of society of his time.

The Bible does not support a concept of a human being - male or female - which should be normative for all times. The biblical view of humanity is theocentric. One concept includes male and female alike: both are created in the image of God, both have fallen into sin, both are reconciled by Christ and are called into a new community in Him.

This is the basis of equality. When some ministries of the church are closed to women, it is in radical contradiction to this biblical anthropology.

Those texts in the Bible which are used as arguments against the ordination of women (e.g. 1 Cor 14:33ff) contradict the basic intentions of the New Testament. They can be understood as implementations of contemporary social realities of that time and as valid norms in their context.

With the admission of women to the ordained ministry the discussion on the whole issue of women in the ministries of the church should not be closed. Rather the decision to ordain women opens new perspectives on many aspects of today's ministry in general, as for example:

1. In ecclesiology: The responsibilities of a pastor have to be clarified so that it is clearly defined what tasks should be shared with other ministries, and what are the pastor's special responsibilities. In this process all other ministries should be encouraged

to use their gifts and capacities to fulfill their mandate. A more adequate correlation of the priesthood of all believers and the ordained ministry must be found, so as to serve our present-day situation.

2. In anthropology: Theological thinking often defines human beings in abstract terms. Significant Christian groups also rely one-sidedly on Genesis 3 for their understanding of human relationships. However, the Bible as a whole describes the existence of human beings as interrelation between persons, in particular between men and women. If we accept this concept, we have to take on ourselves the labor of developing new interrelationships - in our family and in our profession. We should also ask ourselves in what ways we could enable our congregations to use this gift and challenge of human interrelationship.

3. In social ethics: Luther emphasized the ministry of father and mother. The balance between the family responsibilities and professional responsibilities, parenthood and priesthood, ordained ministry and parental ministry is a vital question for all the ministries in the church. So far church workers have been expected, and have also tended, to concentrate their efforts on professional responsibilities at the expense of the family. In practice the question often centers on the right to have free time. The church should recognize that all ministers are responsible not only for their work and their families, but also for their personal health.

All these questions concern both male and female employees, but so far they have hardly been discussed, partly because the male-dominated decision-making bodies did not see the urgency of these issues. Now, when women are entering pastoral and other ministries and wives and husbands of pastors are increasingly working outside the homes, the hidden problems are emerging. However, this kind of a change may also be the *kairos*, the crucial time, when the whole question of ministry has to be re-viewed.

Socialization

Socialization is the process of conditioning the individual to conform to the behavior and thought-patterns of a given society.

Most of what we learn does *not* happen through educational programs but through life experiences in a community. People tend to be sensitive to any expression, verbal or non-verbal, that reveals whether they are treated as adults of equal value rather than as persons of minor importance. The church's education, in the broadest sense of the term, should promote inclusiveness in the congregations, e.g. through inclusive language in liturgies. If women hear the congregation addressed as "brothers" many of them do not feel included as equals. Male language, male symbols and images are not always as obvious as in the above example, but rather hard to identify. Using inclusive images and languages is one way in which congregations can be educated through Sunday Schools, catechism classes, Bible studies, confirmation instruction, etc.

The general tradition and practice in many societies have frequently been discriminatory to women. Women have been the most direct victims of injustices. The lack of a real sense of identity begins at birth when the fact of being born female already implies rejection and inferiority.

The *work* of women, however difficult, is not appreciated as it should be. Most often, work in the house and in the family mainly done by women is not considered as strenuous as that which men do in different employment sectors. In some cultures women cannot easily *voice* their view in public, and their views do not always bear the same weight as those of men. In some cases women are forced to express their views through men if their points are to be considered of importance: men are the

decision-makers. In many social structures single women have no rights in the community - they are regarded as children - hence they are often excluded from full participation. In some societies women do not have inheritance rights.

Practices within the churches with regard to women in church discipline have enhanced society's oppressive structures. For example, in certain Lutheran churches in Africa, only the women who bear children out of wedlock are disciplined and not the fathers. Jesus' teachings must have meant a radical deviation from the way Jewish law and custom looked upon the value and importance of women.

Too often in the past the church has remained silent or avoided responsibility over issues affecting the oppressed, especially women. But today the churches are increasingly concerned about the partnership of women and men:

It is true that the churches have many other things to do besides this . But with regard to many other tasks of the church, the realization of a new community between women and men will rather release energy and increase joy than exhaust the limited resources of our churches and congregations (*In Christ - A New Community*, 175).

Against this background the church has a double task. It is called to work towards an inclusive partnership of men and women both in society and in the church; it is becoming increasingly clear that the life of the church should "exemplify and confer inclusive participation" (*The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry*, 38) - that the whole of humanity should be embodied in the ministry of the church.

Some cultures, perhaps especially in Africa, were open to women's participation within their traditional religions (when for example women served as priestesses). It is therefore not possible to generalize the idea that the effect of culture and tradition had or has negative implication for the participation of women in the church ministries.

Ministries have always been dependent on cultural contexts even when they have been shaped in opposition to prevailing cultures. This is reflected in the New Testament church itself. When discussing the role of women in the church, St. Paul sides with the Old Testament and Jewish tradition in opposing other tendencies in the congregations he addresses (1 Cor 11:6). Why the Hebraic tradition differed from patterns in other oriental societies, why St. Paul asserted it, and what these choices signified in the context of a patriarchal structure which afforded women no leadership roles are questions the answers to which are perennially instructive for the church. Many Lutheran churches today live in patriarchal cultural contexts. Others, however, live in contexts where equality between women and men is established by law. If such churches close ministries to women, they run counter to their cultural norms and must ask themselves whether such opposition is for the sake of a clear witness to the gospel (*The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry*, 36).

Power and Authority - Decision-making and Leadership Style

In all churches, as in any human institutions, there is a structure that brings with it power. Usually one finds the power concentrated in the hands of a few at the top of the hierarchical structure, a power which is exercised in relation to people at the lower echelons. Many experience this power structure as oppressive, destructive and alienating. If power is used as power "over" someone and as coercion, it is sin. It is therefore important to be conscious of the dynamics of power, in order to use it in a responsible way.

Many women in the churches are increasingly aware of these facts and therefore they are not "simply seeking to replace one power group with another of another sex. The search is not for a rigid, authoritarian power on the model of history but a new

model that utilizes skills and leadership learned by the powerless. Current church structures often alienate persons. Power (is) seen not as possession, control, command over others, but the ability to implement action and obtain effective results. Power defined as ability to implement change and respond to human need must be shared power" (*A Chance to Change*, 89).

Authority must be distinguished from power. In the church the authority of the gospel constantly challenges the power structure and the ways power is used. There is often confusion and ambiguity in the church about relating the organizational power and the authority of the gospel. There are examples in church history where the authority of the gospel has been misused (misinterpreted) in order to maintain the power structures as they were. Personal hidden agendas and institutional interest to stay in power often lead to the rejection of the radical call of the gospel for change and renewal of structures.

Authority is not a term of quality but of relation: it characterizes not a person but communication among persons. In the Christian community authority has the character of a gift from God and not a possession of those who exercise leadership. All ministries in the church are exercised as a service to the whole people of God.

Christians then are people to whom God has given the gifts of the Holy Spirit (*charismata*) to empower their common life and their mission in the world ...

Empowered by the same spirit Jesus received at his baptism, the baptized people of God are sent to carry out Christ's ministry: to serve as Jesus served, to preach good news, to proclaim release to the captives, to set at liberty those who are oppressed - to be a sign of God's coming reign (Lk 4:18-19) (*The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry*, 3).

The idea of shared power referred to before points to the need for inclusiveness in decision-making processes, so that decisions

affecting the whole people of God - women and men - are not made in isolation by a male clerical minority in power.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the daily activities in our parochial buildings are organized and performed mostly by women, whereas the functions of leadership are mostly in male hands.

If authority means power to be heard in decision-making bodies, those thousands of women have little authority, except on the local level. However, the part of women in parochial church councils is increasing as are the power and the authority of those councils.

The ordained ministry does not hold a superior status among the ministries of the whole people. Ordained ministers serve the community by serving the gospel. They serve having the authority of the word, but that authority is always subject to testing by the whole church which shares the responsibility for the authenticity of its public proclamation.

Therefore, ordained ministers must not be autocrats or impersonal functionaries. Although called to exercise wise and loving leadership on the basis of the Word of God, they are bound to the faithful in interdependence and reciprocity. Only when they seek the response and acknowledgment of the community can their authority be protected from the distortions of isolation and domination. They manifest and exercise the authority of Christ in the way Christ himself revealed God's authority to the world, by committing their life to the community (BEM, M 16; see also Phil 2:5ff).

This concept of the ordained ministry which has its authority in the word of God does not discriminate between the services of women or men in this office or hold the authority of one superior to the other.

This may represent one of the most significant sources of the church's enrichment and hope: that women in the ordained ministry will increasingly bring out of their life experience fresh perspectives on the exercise of authority in ministry.

Structures, Systems and Values

Existing Lutheran church structures are the result of the way historical, cultural and political forces shaped church bodies as they organized themselves for ministry and mission. Although leadership in the apostolic church was characterized by partnership between women and men, the gradual concentration of power in a male priesthood ultimately limited the leadership of women to home, family and women's communities.

Structure developed as a pyramid of power. The broad base, composed of most of the church membership, was without voice or presence in the decision-making process. Power increased as it moved toward the top of the pyramid, culminating in papal authority. Women were only to be found in the powerless bottom layer, supporting the church and ministering in profound ways but not having opportunity to influence the decision affecting the whole church.

Lutheran church development was influenced by this medieval understanding of women's place in the pyramid of power. While affirming the priesthood of all believers and with many capable women joining in support of the new movement, the Reformation did not actually bring women into positions of leadership. More egalitarian structures allowed for more lay participation in decision-making, but women were still excluded. Even after the right to vote was secured politically for women in many countries, the Lutheran church often delayed giving even that right to women until the male leadership decided to do so. In some Lutheran contexts women are still not permitted to vote in the church.

Unfortunately in some cases Western church values in regard to the woman's place were brought by missionaries to countries where women had previously had a much more influential position in their indigenous cultures.

Pyramidal power structures which support a hierarchical style of authority and decision-making tend to foster competition, and to withhold information from the many in order to give power to the few, and alienate people in power positions from the total life of the church. Constitutions, manuals of policies and procedures and handbooks defining roles in the structure are produced by those at the top of the pyramid. Voices of protest or dissent are silenced at the lower level of power, having the effect of protecting the decision-makers at the top of the pyramid.

Through well-controlled processes persons are selected for positions of power, maintaining the pyramid. Positions are frequently rotated among those who have worked their way together up the pyramid. Male clergy hold almost all of the judicatory leadership positions (bishops, presidents, supervisors) in the Lutheran church, and they influence the placement of pastors and lay leaders in judicatory positions.

Since men have been in control of church structures for such a long time, networks of men who have known each other since seminary days, as colleagues in conferences both local and worldwide, and on commissions and boards of the church, form a powerful informal system for the perpetuation of male power structures. Women, although they may have equal status officially, are often overlooked when selections for positions are made. If chosen, they may be represented in insufficient numbers to have any influence on the decisions which are being made and which often vitally affect their own destiny.

Since judicatory supervisors are almost all male and are responsible in varying degrees for the appointment of pastors and lay leaders in judicatory positions, they may not be as aware of the gifts and talents of women as they are of male colleagues.

Historically, most Lutheran structures have not actively recruited and trained women for leadership. With an increasing number of women capable of, and trained for, all leadership roles, present church leadership needs to examine structural ways to make full participation possible for women.

It would be helpful to know of places where, among Lutheran churches, new structural forms are being created to enable the sharing of power among all members of the body, where the gifts of all are being identified and valued equally and where they are being shared for the mutual upbuilding of the whole church.

In the Sheffield consultation on the *Community of Women and Men in the Church* the following was presented as characteristic of a leadership model based on the model of Jesus Christ:

- sharing of money and resources,
- creating an open and inclusive atmosphere of learning and solidarity,
- living the gospel and witnessing in society, considering all people as worthy of dialogue, of revelation, of health, healing and forgiveness,
- standing for justice, liberation and peace,
- using structures to serve people, not people serving structures (*op.cit.*, 89).

Feminization

Both in society and church there are areas of work largely in the hands of women - areas which, perhaps as a consequence, carry little social status.

A majority of people taking part in the church's life, its activities and its worship, are women. If more women were admitted to the leadership of the church, they would gradually change the image of the church. When the possibility of a *feminization* of the

church is referred to, this describes a process which runs counter to elements in traditional male structures and which introduces new elements and values traditionally associated with women into these structures.

The church is an institution where male values have high priority. More women in decision-making posts could renew the church by contributing other values (e.g. the nurturing quality associated with motherhood which in the church is often replaced by fatherhood; a *warmer* and less competitive climate that would allow for the expression of emotions).

Such a *feminization* of the church would mean a fuller presentation of the gospel: "For Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts" (1 Cor 12:12). Genesis tells how God created human beings, male and female, in his image. Today's overwhelmingly male church is a contradiction of this complementary humanity.

A change could mean chances of a better awareness of what it means to be human. Christians could gain fuller understanding of their identity, thus probably becoming more open to one another. A feminization - in this sense - of the church means greater focus on female imagery and inclusive language. Language and imagery reflect reality, but also have the power to reinforce the status quo. Male imagery and language in the church therefore tend to support its patriarchal aspects.

The Church as Organization and Employer

The church is frequently referred to as a spiritual community. Such a reference would be acceptable to most members of the church. If, however, these same members were asked, "Is the church an organization?", answers would vary. Perhaps for some there would be the temptation to decide between the two - spiritual community or organization. However, it is not a matter of a

simple choice. The church is both a spiritual community and an organization. Reference to the church as organization does not mean that the church is the same kind of an organization as a big business. Such reference rather sees the church as having a goal and that deliberate careful plans are made to move towards that goal. It also recognizes that the church itself is a social force and has a complicated pattern of relationships with other social forces.

As an organization and as a social force the church has both accepted and stood over against some of the characteristics and practices of other organizations. It should be clearly understood that the discussion which follows of the church as employer by no means diminishes what the church is called to be and do. It rather raises the questions:

1. Does the church need to re-examine its own practices as employer in light of the gospel, and
2. is the church setting or lagging behind the standards of employment in society?

Furthermore, raising the issue of the church as employer is intended to give voice to those who may not always be heard. It especially attempts to make explicit the desire that employment practices should not hinder recruitment of people, particularly women, in those ministries of the church which require paid staff.

Since the practices of an organization must be seen within the context of cultural, psychological, sociological and organizational factors, it is not possible to set forth employment practices which can be used universally. But certain basic facts seem clear:

Considerably more than 50% of church workers are women, but that does not change the fact that major decision-making is in the hands of men. It is possible that those women are not aware of the influence they should be exercising on their own behalf. It seems that church bodies prefer to employ single women. It is suspected that they do so

- because such women are more easily moved from place to place,
- because they are perceived as having more time and a greater commitment to give for their work,
- because unmarried women are viewed as not having to be occupied with matters such as household and family,
- because they can be paid less than men and require fewer benefits.

Several factors related to married women can be observed. Frequently where considering employing a married woman, the church decides for or against her depending on her family situation. This raises an employment issue that is not raised in the case of a man. The church therefore tends to take over decisions that should be made by a woman individually or within a family context.

It is suspected that in countries with a large number of unemployed persons, women are the first to be removed from their positions. This contributes to the view that the church sees women only as workers and not as an enrichment for the church and its ministry. The maintenance of traditional work patterns within the church tends to block experimenting with new ideas and possibilities of work patterns, e.g. job sharing, part-time work, employment for special functions, etc.

Initiating and enforcing personnel practices for women can be viewed as a risk by persons in leadership positions. These risks sometimes may result in conflict, jeopardizing personal popularity and perhaps even leading to possible defeat in positions secured through election. There may as a result be a tendency to avoid doing what is known to be right in order to secure one's own status and/or position.

Job descriptions can contribute to excluding the employment of women. Job demands are implicitly or explicitly worded so that it is assumed that only a man can fill the position. It is possible in

some situations to place a high priority on theological training whereas the job could actually be filled by a person who is informed but does not have formal theological training.

Expectations of women working within the organizational church are sometimes shattered by the way the church deals with differences in salaries for women, and pays little attention to interpersonal relationship and affirmation, and ignores sexual harassment.

The church cannot be held responsible for all the situations which exist but it can be held responsible for speaking out on these issues and being as consistent as possible with the gospel in its own employment practices.

Many churches have taken positive steps in employment. However, the issues related to differing functions within the church and how to handle this remain unresolved. Churches continue their effort to define ordination and commissioning. The LWF statement on ministry recognizes this problem. Although the implications and solutions will vary, the criteria must remain, and they should be consistent with the gospel.

Education

Equipping the whole people of God for the entire spectrum of ministries of the church requires the development of all the latent skills and capacities of the members. In this context there is no doubt that women make up a large potential resource within the church.

The explanation which is often given for the exclusion of women is that "in our church there are no qualified women for this task." This may be true in many cases, but the reason is not that there are no suitable women but that they have not had a chance to develop their leadership capacities. In many countries the level of formal education for women is far lower than that of

men. However, the same excuse is often expressed by churches where the educational level is equal for all. This fact suggests that the whole community needs to be re-educated so that there may be a change of attitudes towards a more inclusive participation.

This education starts within families. For the growth towards equality, the relationships and practices within a family are more important than any special teachings on the subject. The most effective way the church can teach equality and individual participation is through adult education programs for parents. This must be supplemented by Sunday School, children's programs and youth work. Both boys and girls should be encouraged to assume and develop leadership skills.

At the level of youth education there seems to be an inclination to assign leadership roles to boys rather than girls whereas this happens less often in children's groups. It can hardly be expected that later on men will trust in the leadership capabilities of women. By that time women themselves have become indoctrinated with a diminished self-esteem.

As equal opportunities for formal education and training of leadership skills are not yet available for women in many countries, there is a need for special leadership training programs for women in order to equip them for tasks in church and society.

The demands, often expressed by women, of a special quota for women in church decision-making bodies, at meetings etc. could have an important educational impact. To participate at decision-making meetings is the best way to learn about the administration and policy of the church. For male members in these bodies the presence of women means a chance to learn from experiences that women have gained.

Key functions for fostering cooperation and inclusive participation are performed by seminaries and other institutions responsible for educating persons who in their turn will assume responsibility for educating and forming members of the church. Special care

should be taken that no kind of open or hidden discrimination prevails towards women in educational programs, curricula, and in the daily practices of training institutions. The churches should also be attentive that women are given equal opportunities with men for further training, specialization and exchange programs.

One of the areas where women should be more fully included is the liturgical life. This has important educational aspects and is especially vital in churches where women are not ordained. The worship service must be an expression of the celebration of the whole people of God. This means that the voices of women must be clearly heard. The contents of sermons and prayers should reflect the life situations and concern of women and men.

Ecumenical Aspects of Unity

The ordination of women raises a number of ecumenical aspects in different contexts. On the one hand, there is the question of unity within our own confession. This, then, is a unity within the Lutheran churches, within a local church and within the local congregations. On the other hand, the ordination of women has also played a certain role in the ecumenical relationships with other confessions and communities, especially the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.

According to the survey carried out recently by the LWF on the ordination of women, around 75% of Lutherans worldwide belong to churches that ordain women. It would seem that behind this figure there is a considerable theoretical unity within the Lutheran community on this issue. However, it is a fact that the ordination of women has been the source of tension within certain churches and their congregations.

Arguments used by the opponents frequently point to the danger of deteriorating ecumenical relations. These, it is maintained, will be threatened by the ordination of women. However, it has

proved to be the case that the effects of the ordination of women are frequently overestimated.

The official attitude of the Roman Catholic Church is clearly negative: The church maintains that "in fidelity to the example of its Lord", it "does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination" (*The Ministry in the Church*, 105). In the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue it has been seen that the ordination of women implies a greater change in the pastoral exercise of the ministry than for the theological doctrine itself (cf. *ibid.*, 104).

On this subject, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* indicates a somewhat different point of view:

Where Christ is present, human barriers are being broken. The Church is called to convey to the world the image of a new humanity. There is in Christ no male or female (Gal 3:28). Both women and men must discover together their contributions to the service of Christ in the Church. The Church must discover the ministry which can be provided by women as well as that which can be provided by men. A deeper understanding of the comprehensiveness of ministry which reflects the interdependence of men and women needs to be more widely manifested in the life of the Church.

Though they agree on this need, the churches draw different conclusions as to the admission of women to the ordained ministry. An increasing number of churches has decided that there is no biblical or theological reason against ordaining women, and many of them have subsequently proceeded to do so. Yet many churches hold that the tradition of the Church in this regard must not be changed (BEM, M 18).

One cannot avoid these ecumenical issues, but they should not be over-emphasized. The ecumenical treatment of these questions contains various aspects that each church has to come to terms

with. In these ecumenical contexts, those solutions should be sought which best serve the cause of the gospel.

In this search and evaluation the churches have much to learn from one another in order to maintain sufficient openness towards new challenges. A promising starting point for future work is to be found in the penultimate section of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*.

Some churches ordain both men and women, others ordain only men. Differences on this issue raise obstacles to the mutual recognition of ministries. But those obstacles must not be regarded as substantive hindrance for further efforts towards mutual recognition. Openness to each other holds the possibility that the Spirit may well speak to one church through the insights of another. Ecumenical consideration, therefore, should encourage, not restrain, the facing of this question (BEM, M 54).

It seems, in conclusion, that the churches will sometimes have to choose between an inner and an interconfessional unity. In the worldwide ecumenical community of today the question of unity vis-a-vis the ordination of women remains open. An increasing number of LWF churches has decided to ordain women. This decision is based on their understanding of the Bible and the Lutheran confession and of the needs of humankind of today.



